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HENRY HOLT & CO. NEW YORK.

THE HARP OF LIFE

BY

ELIZABETH GODFREY

Author of "Poor Human Nature"

Bedford



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1900

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TO

Mrs. Templeman

THIS STORY OF THE ART SHE LOVES IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

There are two Master-Harpers whose touch upon the strings has power to draw out the complex harmonies which make the music of life. We submit willingly enough to him of the crimson garments and shining eyes, and our hearts sway to the rhythm of his playing; but when the black-robed one comes out of the shadows and lays a chill hand upon us we shrink and wail, not knowing that without him our life's music would be but trivial tunes, forgotten as soon as heard. . . . And the names of the two players are Love and Sorrow.

THE HARP OF LIFE.

I.

A GIRL and two men. One tuning a violin and looking down at her sideways, smiling, confident, something over-bold perhaps ; the other standing erect, stiff, deprecating, with a shadow of vexation on his face. The woman between them, resting her elbows on the table and her chin in the palm of one hand, glanced from one to the other with an air of childlike candour—or so it seemed, though there was perhaps the ghost of a smile lurking in the corners of her eyes where the curly lashes met and mingled.

Not a novel situation by any means : many comedies—and tragedies—begin like that, but the world is growing very old, and situations have a trick of repeating themselves ; aye, even in these days when they would have us believe that woman no longer cares to captivate, and enters the arena only to compete with men. The little soprano fancied herself a very modern woman indeed, yet perhaps she may have been secretly conscious of the *Ewig-weibliche* whereby she held those two in the hollow of her hand —the white magic which it is given to some women, and those not always the sweetest nor the handsomest —to wield like a spell. There were three or four other women in the room whose claims to good looks might

rank higher than those of Rose Alba, yet it was across her that the Conductor and the First Violin were exchanging looks like sword-thrusts, and at her elbow the rival bouquets lay.

So much for the personages. The scene of the little drama was the performer's room at the back of the great Palm-house which Pinecliff had recently erected near its sea-front, and which under Graham Knowles's management had won celebrity as a forcing-house for the best music in the south of England, no less than for the tall palm-trees which were its distinguishing adornment.

Wailing sounds through the half-open door spoke of the tuning of instruments : the orchestra was filling up rapidly. The Conductor addressed his rival with an irritating assumption of command.

"It is time you were in your place, Redway."

"Same to you," was the half-laughing retort ; for there had always been practical equality between the chief and his first lieutenant. The latter lingered a moment, for he always exercised to the full the leader's privilege of being last to take his seat, then went with a shrug of the shoulders and a significant glance at the lady which left him, though in retreat, master of the situation.

The one who remained failed to follow up his advantage ; he seemed diffident and ill at ease. "I too must leave you," he said awkwardly, "unless you would honour me by coming round to the front to hear the overture. I have reserved stalls for you."

"Thanks, no. I have heard 'Tannhäuser' *ad nauseam*. I am very well where I am. I don't think I will take the trouble to move until I am obliged."

She sniffed her flowers indifferently, first one bunch and then the other, and took no heed of his manifest disappointment. Her sister did, but her assurance of her eagerness to hear the renowned Pinecliff band fell flat ; indeed, it was hardly heard. So she too stayed where she was, and the tenor, who like themselves came from town, took the vacant chair beside Rose Alba and entertained her with scraps of gossip about various public singers while the overture was being played.

By and by the Conductor reappeared : the right to hand the soprano on for her solo belonged to him, and he was not minded to forego it, but he dared not ask whether it were by inadvertence that her apparently careless hand took up the white bouquet—not his. That fact was not lost upon Redway, who was to play the obligato to her first song, and his manner showed that he appreciated its significance.

She certainly understood the scope of her own beauty and the way to set it off. With the usual fringe she would have been merely an ordinarily pretty, fair girl ; with her hair brought low and puffed out above her small ears, after the fashion of Aubrey Beardsley's strange women in the early numbers of "The Yellow Book," there was a touch of the fantastic that arrested the eye. So too in the cut of the plain black satin gown which an unappreciative woman in the front row compared to a pen-wiper : it fitted the narrow hips like a sheath and spread out fanwise above the little pointed toes. The severe blackness, cut heart-shaped over the white bosom, made the slender throat, round which hung only a fine gold chain, look still more slender, and was far more

effective than the chiffons and roses of the other singers.

She had the rare gift of looking charming while she sang ; no grimaces nor forced smiles marred the effect of her high notes ; the clear, well-modulated voice flowed without effort through the pretty parted lips as she answered and strove to rival the bird-trills of the violin ; for the song was " The Bird and the Maiden."

" She is like a Greuze," remarked a man in the stalls in an audible aside. Something in the childish contour of the face, the soft lips showing the small white teeth, the innocent wide-open blue eyes, justified the comparison, and his companion nodded an assent, adding, " It is a cold little voice though ; the notes drop out like a string of beads."

Behind her rose the close-packed ranks of players and desks, for there was an orchestral accompaniment to the song. Just a confused mass of heads it seemed : heads brown and black, heads rough and smooth—the rough predominating, for the band were more than half foreigners. Yet after all every one diverse, with his own idiosyncracies, his own story, to himself the centre of his own world ; every one possessed of a gift, a faculty, that gave him his place, his value in the scheme of things, yet here only part of an undistinguished crowd, even as the music that he made formed only a single strand in the blended harmony.

From this background the First Violin stood out detached, not only by the separate part he bore in the song, but no less by virtue of a dominant personality. Neither he nor his fiddle was ever lost in a crowd, and it was this quality that made him an in-

comparable leader. He stood forward, not tall, but firm and square-set, with an air as though the world —or at least the realm of music—belonged to him, and held his violin with an easy mastery, as he made it warble and trill through the nightingale's song, while on his lips hovered a triumphant smile as his eyes lighted on the white flowers Rose Alba carried. The other man, the Conductor, in his post of vantage, seemed out of it.

At the conclusion of the concert Redway, whether by the soprano's management or his own it would be difficult to say, succeeded in being the one to hand her to her carriage. The other was so much the slower man, he was constantly suffering himself to be forestalled.

The successful one took the opportunity to whisper with the faintest pressure of the hand that rested on his arm : "You carried my flowers ; that was good of you."

"Oh, were they yours ? They were white, and you know I am in mourning."

He stood still an instant, and his eyes flashed in the bright light above the doorway.

"You knew they were mine," he said angrily. "Why on earth should you pretend you did not ?"

A smile flickered for an instant at the corner of her mouth. Few things entertained her better than putting men in a passion.

"Well, perhaps I did," she said ; "you are quite welcome to fancy so if it pleases you."

They had come out meanwhile upon the wide flight of steps, and she paused to look round for her sister. "How pretty !" she exclaimed, as she gazed back at

the wide glass hall filled with the dazzle of electric light, in the midst of which masses of tall palms and tree-ferns stood out with magic clearness.

"Beautiful!" he echoed; but his eye had travelled further, to where Orion reared himself above the pine trees whose ragged outlines showed inky black against the star-pricked night sky. Beyond the noise of feet and voices, of a crowd dispersing, the crunch of wheels, the harsh call for so-and-so's carriage, was the enfolding sound of the never-resting sea. He was silent a moment, listening for it as it came again and again, till she cried with a little quick movement: "Ah, here they are at last! Ethel, I thought you were lost. Now where is the fly?"

In a minute it came up, and Redway handed her in, tucking her cloak carefully about her, and taking an unnecessary time over it; or so thought the other, who had to content himself with the sister, and wait his turn to make his adieux.

Some spirit of mischief certainly possessed Rose Alba that evening, for she leaned across the Conductor while in the very act of shaking hands with him, to say to his rival: "Oh, Mr. Redway, my sister and I are going to make a pilgrimage to the New Forest to-morrow; would you care to join us? Bicycling of course. We feel we really ought to see something of the neighbourhood, so we shall not go back to town till the evening."

Before the man addressed could answer, his chief had spoken:

"It is no use for you to make any engagements for to-morrow, Redway; you will have to conduct; I am going to town on business."

The carriage door slammed. The girl looked out a moment at the two black figures standing together against the brilliant background, then turned to her sister with a laugh on her lips. But the laugh was not answered.

"Em, how can you!"

Rose Alba, who in private life answered to the plain name of Emily White, shut her eyes and nestled her head into the angle of the carriage without answering, but Ethel went on:

"Em, tell me candidly, do you really care about Roger Redway, or are you only using him to prick the other on? Because if you are, it strikes me you are going too far."

"My good child, what a baby you are! And how literal! You don't suppose I should think seriously about either of them?"

"Then how can you!" said Ethel again with still more reproachful emphasis.

"How can I! How can I help it? I did not make myself."

"Those two were friends," went on Ethel, "and in a couple of days you have made them hate each other. You may think it something to be proud of. I should feel very differently if I were in your place."

"Brat, you are far too censorious for your age. I shall have to take an older and easier chaperon. You must admit, though, it is very funny to see them making themselves so ridiculous."

"I did not think you were so primitive, Em; you who always profess to be a thoroughly up-to-date woman."

"Primitive! You do say the oddest things, child. Explain."

"I will explain in a fable—well, not a fable exactly, because it happens to be true; it is rather what Mrs. Malaprop would call an alligator."

"All right; get on. Let us have the 'alligator' by all means. Once upon a time—"

"Once upon a time I was doing my hair by the window looking on to the old garden at home when I heard a fearful fluttering and squealing in the privett bush outside, and there were two cock chaffinches pecking at each other's eyes and tearing each other's beautiful tail-feathers out, while the little hen sat laughing on a flower-bed and watched to see which would prove the better bird. But she at least meant to take one of them. Now for the moral. I should have thought that if progress means anything, we might have outgrown the primitive instinct of setting men to fight."

"What a jobation!" said Em. "But look here; it is all very well to say, Let them both alone; but I have my way to make, and they may be very useful to me—one or both of them."

"I don't see what possible use Redway could be to you."

"Nor I, just at present; but he may climb. Where Graham Knowles is now, he always will be. Still even he might push me effectively if he liked. His direct influence of course is chiefly local and provincial, but his indirect is considerable; it is worth remembering."

"And then you go and insult him by leaving his flowers on the table and taking the other man's!"

"Why, my child, how could I help it? My gown

was black and the scarlet geraniums would have simply killed my effect. If I had carried them I should never have overheard the remark that I looked like a Greuze."

"Well, you had better take care. If I know anything of faces, Graham Knowles is not a man to be trifled with. If you want his backing up you must pay the price."

"If the price is marrying him it is too dear."

"Well perhaps," admitted Ethel. "I don't care myself for his narrow head and long stiff figure; he does not look a bit like a musician. The other may not be exactly handsome, but there is more emphasis about him, and I like his eyes."

"The other! Oh, he is not in it."

Em flung back her cloak and leaned back, clasping a pair of very white slim arms behind her head. "*Quelle vie!*" she exclaimed as she finished a portentous yawn. "I thought I should have liked the battle of life better, but I am getting a little tired of things as they are. What a slow business it is making one's way! I could get on very well if there were not such crowds of other people always getting in the light. One wants a lift somehow. This singing at provincial concerts and private 'at homes' is poor work. When Carton Doyle refused me an engagement at the 'Frivolity' I almost made up my mind I must marry."

"I wish you would," said her sister. "If Colonel—"

"Oh, shut up!" And at the moment the fly stopped at the door of the hotel, and Em sprang out and ran in, leaving her sister to follow.

II.

When Doctor Octavius White died it was found that he had left but a slender patrimony to divide between his four daughters. He had been a hard-working man, but in his profession the hardest work often has the least to show for it. Many a time he had been too busy to remember and call in the money owing to him, oftener still too pitiful to ask it from those who needed his services the most and were least able to pay for them. The executors thought there ought to have been a good sum realised for the practice, which was an old-established one, but it appeared that of late years a younger and more fashionable man had settled in the neighbourhood with the object of "creating" a practice, and his smart brougham, his little dinners, and his wife's musical "at homes" had proved a good form of advertisement, and had drawn away the more lucrative portion of the patients, who began to say that the old doctor's manner was brusque and his prescriptions old fashioned. An examination of the books, after driving away a few intending purchasers, had resulted in a very poor offer with which the trustees felt bound to close, on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread.

The sisters took the announcement of their narrow fortunes philosophically, their uncle thought; indeed the calmness of their demeanour throughout had rather taken him aback. He had expected to be

deluged with tears and lamentations in this household of bereaved women from whom the sole prop had just been taken away, and behold, they were composedly asking for information about investments and prospects. Some few decorous tears were shed; the girls spoke with lowered voice of "poor dear papa," and agreed with condoling friends who said it must be a sad break-up for them; but they turned their attention at once with great good sense to considering their pecuniary position. The uncle tried to say to himself that he was thankful they were so reasonable, but he caught himself wondering whether if he died his little Madge and Molly would be so quickly consoled.

Kindly as the old doctor had been in his work, he had been something of a martinet at home, with a vague idea that his womankind existed to darn his socks and order his dinners, and had always refused to open his mind to the perception that four grown women might want some further outlet for their energy. And they were all four energetic, hockey-playing, cycling, vigorous young women; high-school educated too, and quite alive to the stirrings and upheavals of the day. They "read everything," or thought they did, and had an opinion to offer on every subject debated in the magazines. Possibly the old man was mourned more sincerely in some of the alleys in the lowest quarter of the town, where his caustic scoldings had been accompanied by an ever open hand, than he was in his own home. Perhaps it was rather a breath of emancipation than a sigh of grief that seemed to pass over the sisters when the blinds were drawn up after the funeral.

It was not until a week later that the uncle, who had

stayed on to look into things, gave them a clear explanation of their position, before he took his leave.

"There is really quite sufficient to keep four ladies in comfort and respectability," he had said to Bertha, the eldest, after going through the papers with her. "Had it been necessary your Aunt Louisa and I would cheerfully have offered a home to one of you; but as it is you will do much better undivided. I should recommend you to look at one of those little semi-detached houses in Shaftsbury Gardens: it would be just the thing. If you want me to see the landlord for you I could run down again later."

They thanked him politely, and when they had seen him enter his cab and had shut the front door behind him, they looked at each other and laughed.

With one consent they turned their steps away from the prim drawing-room close to the entrance, which they had been occupying in formal state during their uncle's visit, and the four pairs of flying feet went up the stairs and along the passages to the shabby old schoolroom at the back of the house, where they had planted their standard of revolt. The drawing-room, usually the domain of the daughters, had never seemed theirs; it had always to be kept in a condition of frigid order, liable to the invasion of waiting patients; but up-stairs they did as they pleased.

The youngest went straight to a cupboard, from which she took a small flat tin box and handed it round. They were not chocolates that came out of it, for silver match-boxes at once came into requisition.

Presently, when the air was becoming faintly hazy, the eldest took up the word.

"What a mercy it is that the Brat came of age last

week, or Uncle Henry would have been able to interfere with us much more. Now advice is the utmost he can offer."

"Fancy us," came a voice from the depths of the rocking-chair as it swayed gently to and fro—"Just fancy us living in a semi-detached villa in reduced circumstances. Four decayed gentlewomen! How much did he say there would be, Bertie?"

"About three hundred and fifty altogether, as far as I can make out. That means something less than ninety pounds a year apiece. Plenty for an able-bodied woman to start in life and feel there is something to fall back upon."

"H'm," said the one who rocked, "I wish it had been more; it ought to have been."

"You are unpractical, Emmie. We have to do with what is, not with what ought to have been. Now let us talk out our plans. What are your views, Alice?"

"District nursing," said the second sister briefly. "I have written already to one or two hospitals to inquire about training and terms."

In most large families there is one with a bent towards good works. Alice took after her father in this respect, but unluckily instead of drawing them into sympathy, her desire of aiding humanity had been rather a bone of contention, since she had been the first to protest against his antiquated notions; and as she was a straightforward woman who marched direct for what she wanted, they had clashed from the outset.

"Good," said Bertha. "I too have been making my plans: I am going to see what I can do in journalism. Provincial at first, I am sorry to say, but I

suppose one must be content to begin at the beginning. I have heard of something at Birmingham, and if I can once get my foot on the ladder I may work my way up to London later on. I fancy I have rather a faculty for descriptive writing."

Emmie clasped her hands behind her head and took another prodigious tilt backwards. "I of course shall sing ; but I wonder how on earth one begins."

"At a music-hall, I imagine," laughed the youngest, the one they called "the Brat"; "one of those attached to a low public-house, don't you know, reeking—that is the word—with foul tobacco."

"Don't be so silly, Brat. I mean how does one set about getting engagements."

"Depends what sort. I suppose one must get testimonials to begin with, and then one puffs oneself out in the advertisement column of some paper, and has cards printed and stuck in a stationer's window."

"Not good enough. I don't intend to go into that line."

"I don't see how else you are to do it," said Bertha, the practical. "Of course the thing would have been to have been trained at some *conservatoire* or academy ; that puts its *imprimatur* upon you ; but since you have only had private lessons I expect you'll find you have to stick to the lower walks."

Em pouted. "What a shame it is !" she said ; "as if Madame Bianca had not taught me just as well here as if I had gone to her at the Royal College."

"If I were you," went on the elder sister, "I should get Bianca to give me a good testimonial—I expect she would, for you won't be big enough to get in her way—and then ask all our friends and acquaintance

to get you introductions to sing at parties. You might really scrape up a connection that way."

"I don't fancy that notion of scraping up. I want to burst on an admiring public."

"That is simply foolish," said Bertha. "Everybody must begin at the beginning."

"But some begin a good deal further on than others, and considering how pretty I am I ought to find it easier than most."

"How can you be so vain?" said Alice. "You might have waited for one of us to say how pretty you are."

"I might have waited long enough," laughed Em, while the Brat took up her sister's defence:

"It is not vanity; she is merely appraising her looks as part of her stock in trade. Much more sensible, I think, than pretending one thinks oneself hideous. I have no doubt either that it will come in very handy."

"Of course it will; for what I want to do is to sing in light opera, and you will admit that looks count for something in getting an engagement for that sort of thing."

"H'm. I doubt yours being in the right sort of scale for stage effects; and candidly, my dear, I don't think you sing well enough. You have a very pretty drawing-room voice. *Voilà tout!*"

"Well, what was the use of singing well when the poor old Dad would always insist on one's hiding one's talent in a napkin? I could sing a lot better if I chose to grind; but there never has been anything to work for till now. You'll see I shall put my shoulder to the wheel. Well, now the word comes to

the youngest. Pray where do you feel your vocation to lie, Brat?"

"In taking care of you, I believe. I am quite sure some one will have to do that. You are far too young and pretty to run about the world loose. If you go on the stage you will have to engage me as your dresser. You could not do better, I assure you, for I understand your style, and I don't know anybody whose looks depend more on get-up than yours do. If you take me you will be a success; otherwise—"

"Come, don't keep fooling," said Bertha. "You are too childish, Ethel. It is quite time we ceased to make a baby of you. Seriously, what do you intend to do?"

"I don't know that I have any particular talent," said Ethel musingly, blowing a delicate ring of smoke, and watching it float up to the ceiling; "unless it is for whistling, and that I am afraid would only find a field in the music-hall of the 'reeking' description that I alluded to just now."

"You will have to do something lucrative, that is very certain. I am quite sure you will never live, dress —and smoke—upon ninety pounds per annum. You know your consumption of cigarettes largely exceeds any of ours."

"You need not be afraid of my coming on you for cigarettes or any other necessary of life," responded the Brat something tartly. "I shall make my own way, never fear. Besides in any case I conclude I shall be kicked out of the nest. You'll sell the furniture?"

"Certainly. We seem none of us to have any desire for a joint home; but you two younger ones can have a month to make up your minds."

"Upon my word I don't see why I should not do something in the journalistic line myself. You might get me on your paper, Bertha, for a weekly news-letter from town. I shall see no end of life, chaperoning Em, and I am not a bad hand at describing the fashions. Bear me in mind, won't you? You and I will go up to London, Em; you shall have more singing lessons, and we will have a high old time. We can live very tolerably upon our little all till work comes in. You need not wait so condescendingly, Bee, for us 'younger ones' to be off your hands; we're ready to go just as soon as we have packed our duds."

The uncle was a very conscientious man, and felt his responsibilities towards his brother's orphan daughters. After much cogition and taking of counsel with his wife, he sent them a letter full of sage advice about their entering on the life he had planned for them, and enclosed a paper which their aunt had drawn up for their guidance as to expenses, showing exactly what the items of the housekeeping should come to: So much for rent and taxes, so much for coals; one servant only; the elder ones must undertake the more elaborate parts of the cooking, and the younger girls should do the light housework. Everything was most carefully estimated, down to proper allowance of soap, candles, and blacking for each week. It was a pity that so much pains should have been bestowed in vain; but the letter crossed one from Bertha, announcing their decision to sell the furniture and separate, each pursuing her own career.

"Well," said Uncle Henry as he laid down the letter and put his spectacles in their case, "they must go their own way; I wash my hands of them."

III.

TRULY it was a pity that two men who had been friends, who had stood shoulder to shoulder through nearly seven years of difficulty and struggle, who had shared each other's aims, sustained each other's courage, and together had achieved the impossible and accomplished a work which neither could have done alone, should now face one another with angry scorn in their eyes and bitter enmity in their hearts, all because of a woman who valued neither for himself, but only for the hand up he might give her on the ladder of ambition.

Their affection had stood the strain of professional jealousy, though there had not been wanting moments of tension between them. Graham Knowles was secretly aware of his own limitations, and was now and then conscious of envy, lurking as it were round the corner, ready to slip in between him and his friend. He had never allowed it a footing, but now an apple of discord had been cast between them that should turn all the sweetness of their friendship to gall.

For it seemed to Knowles that he had been treacherously dealt with; that his comrade had deliberately gone about to rob him of his sweetheart, and he did well to be angry. He never realised how much his own reserve had had to do with the disaster to his hopes. Since he had only mentioned Rose Alba as a promising young singer to whom he had been asked to give

a helping hand, how should Redway know that she was the desire of his heart? A woman might have divined it perhaps, by the lore in which women are learned, but another man could not guess without being told what his silence and absence of mind, his eagerness to secure her for one of his concerts, his half-concealed anxiety as to her success, might mean. If he had guessed, Roger's loyalty would have prevented from the beginning his regarding her in any other light than as *bien d'autrui;* but how should he know? The field appeared to him to be open to both.

The instinct of girls in love seems to be towards confidences ; that of a man towards concealment. He will not as a rule speak at all of the woman he loves till he can speak of her as won. While defeat is possible he shrinks from the eye of his friend. Redway had always thought Knowles "not much of a fellow for women," and that he had regarded Rose Alba as already almost his own when he brought her down to sing for him, never entered the imagination of the friend who fancied he knew all his concerns. So it had come about that the younger, better-looking man had stepped in with the audacious self-confidence that goes so much farther with women than modesty ; with the masterful, taking-for-granted kind of manner that made the shyer man stand aghast, and seemed on the point of snatching the prize out of the just-closing hand of the other.

The remembrance of all that he had done for this man, all the help he had extended, all the friendship he had shown him, rose up in bitterness before Graham Knowles's eyes, and his heart cried Traitor! Ingrate! And Redway, stung by the sudden assump-

tion of authority where there had been all but equality, muttered to himself : "Jealous fool! Does he think that if she cares for me, petty tyranny will help him?"

The hate that springs from love is tenfold bitterer than that which grows out of dislike, and the sharpness was all the greater because still they wanted each other, and the old friendship died hard. Perhaps there was a consciousness in the minds of both that the friendship was after all worth more than the woman it was being sacrificed to. Yet both were too stubborn to yield. The grit which had made them win success out of the very jaws of failure made it absolutely impossible for either to give way or stand aside.

Ten years ago Roger Redway had come to London, without money, without friends, without introductions ; with only his fiddle and a scholarship, won not only against odds, but in the very teeth of prohibition, to carve out a career for himself if he could.

It was doubly hard on him to have to do it, instead of finding his path in life made smooth for him, since he was born to an inheritance of music ; it was bred in the very bone of him, and he, if any one, might have looked for a fair start. His father was a composer of eminence, as had been *his* father before him ; he was moreover a Doctor of Music and organist of the ancient Cathedral of Dronechester, and might have given his boy every advantage ; but he was one of those abnormal developments, not uncommon amongst musicians, whom the most harmonious of the arts seems by some mysterious alchemy to set at discord with common life : a harsh, bitter, discontented man, thwarted in his ambitions as a composer, believing critics and concert directors alike in league

against him ; always at furious odds with his Precentor and his Dean, bullying his pupils, quarrelling with his patrons, and finding in his musical sensibility a scourge for his own back. His neighbours asserted that he had worried his young wife into her grave ; had she lived she might perhaps have exerted a civilising influence. His little boy, who sang before he could talk, Doctor Redway regarded as a means of revenging himself on Music by bringing up to the Law. Of course Nature was too strong for him, and he had to learn that a son is an individual, not a piece of property to be disposed of at the sole will of his parent.

He refused to teach the child music, but forgot that he had not a monopoly of the art, and the little fellow picked it up here, there, and everywhere in spite of him. When other children spent their coppers in marbles and bull's-eyes, the little Roger saved his till he could buy an old fiddle out of a pawn-shop, and he coaxed one of the vicars-choral of the cathedral, who was keeping company with his father's housekeeper, to teach him to play it in the back kitchen well out of earshot. The organ of course was strictly tabooed. His enthusiasm was the more remarkable as there was nothing of the *Wunderkind*, the refined, spiritualised genius, about the child ; he was a bit of a ragamuffin, a rough rude boy, ready with his fists and rebellious against authority, with much of his father's gruffness, tempered however by the happier, wholesomer nature bequeathed him by his mother.

By and by he was sent to the grammar school, an ancient institution where the lads of Dronechester had for generations been flogged through their Latin

grammar. He did not take much to humane letters, but fought and scrambled his way up, developing in the process a toughness that stood him in good stead later on. For awhile his musical life was checked, and Doctor Redway began to congraulate himself on having done the right thing with him. At seventeen Roger's school-days were abruptly ended, and he was told he was about to be articled to a lawyer. Then came the conflict of wills. The young man had no notion of being handed over without a word, like a mere chattel, to a profession for which he had neither taste nor talent, and told his father bluntly he did not intend to be a lawyer.

"Then how do you intend to live, pray?" had been his father's response to this ultimatum. "I am neither going to send you to college nor keep you at home in idleness."

"I don't ask you to, sir; I mean to stand for the Kempthorne scholarship."

The Kempthorne, it must be explained, was a musical scholarship at one of the London academies, founded by a predecessor of Doctor Redway for the benefit of the lads of Dronechester, and usually gained by a retiring cathedral chorister. Doctor Redway was one of the judges by virtue of his office. That his own son should think of competing appeared to him monstrous. He swore loudly that he would never permit it. "No son of mine shall be a musician, by G—!" he shouted. "A beggarly profession! I only wish my own father had treated me as I am treating you"

The weeks went by. Father and son exchanged no word upon the subject that filled both minds. Per-

haps the old man persuaded himself that Roger had yielded, though sullenly; at any rate the indentures with Messrs. Hiscock & Payne were being drawn up. Meanwhile the examination papers for the Kempthorne were sent in. One set was so far superior to the rest that the verdict of the judges was unanimous, though it yet remained to go through the tests in technique and sight-reading in presence of the examiners before the final decision. The chosen instrument was the violin, so Doctor Redway knew that the promising candidate was not one of his choristers. He was privately glad that he had forbidden his son to compete: this lad's papers were, he thought, far beyond anything Roger could do, and for his own credit's sake he did not want him worsted.

When several boys had gone through the required tests, some well, some falteringly, and it came to the turn of the competitor on whom all hopes were set, the old doctor looked up with some curiosity to see his own son, Roger, walk in with his head in the air and his fiddle in his hand. For an instant he was speechless, paralysed with rage; then just as the boy had tucked his violin under his chin and drew the bow across the strings, he made a sudden rush at him, and had not two of the other examiners thrown themselves in the way, there might have been an ugly scene. They tried to get the irascible old man to hear reason while young Redway stood still, leaning his shoulder against the desk, his instrument still in position, ready to go on when the tumult should subside.

One of the judges tried to pacify him by compliments on the conspicuous ability his son had shown, but found he was only adding fuel to the flames; an-

other at length managed to get a hearing while he represented that though the contest was bound to go on, Doctor Redway's son might decline the scholarship should it fall to him. Finally the angry man threw up his connection with the whole affair, and went out, violently slamming the door behind him.

It might well have been that the lad's nerve would be too much shaken after such a scene to allow him to do himself justice, and the thing might go against him after all; but young Redway's was not a nature easily quelled; opposition spurred rather than daunted him. Never had he played in finer style than on that critical day: the scholarship was unquestionably his.

That was the last time he saw his father for many a long year. He felt the utter uselessness of staying at home to be forbidden to accept what he had won. He crammed his few clothes and possessions into an old portmanteau, and with the trifle of money left him out of a niggardly allowance, went off to London as many a budding genius has done before him.

Whether the old man, left alone in the wide house, missed the noise of slamming doors, quick footsteps, whistlings and shoutings up-stairs and down, or preferred the silence, he never said. The boy took it very much to heart at first and was terribly homesick, and then forgot. He was but a boy, and had hardly yet outgrown the instinctive child-love for his father just because he was his father, which in unreflective natures persists quite irrespective of harsh usage; but presently he grew absorbed with his new life, pleased with his independence, and the memory of home faded more and more.

The three years of his scholarship passed like a

dream; then came the day when he took away his fiddle, his books, and his testimonials, and stood alone to conquer his place in the world if he could.

Here would have been the chance for the old-time patron; but the old-time patron is an extinct species. Fortune seemed disposed to buffet the lad at the outset, perhaps to test the value of the gifts she had so lavishly bestowed. Perhaps it was his own fault; he had not made himself a favourite with the authorities at the college: wilful, insubordinate, inclined to criticise those set over him, he found fewer helping hands held out to him than did many of his colleagues less gifted than himself. "Young Redway will go his own way," remarked one of the professors who had tried to advise him; "he must learn experience for himself."

His first engagement ended in a speedy fiasco, because he had yet to learn the essential lesson of subordination: needful more or less in every line of life, indispensable in an orchestra. The matter was peculiarly unfortunate, because the director he had offended happened to have it in his power to make it difficult for the young man to obtain any other engagement, and he used the power spitefully. Baffled again and again, Roger set his teeth and struggled on, resolved that he would not turn his steps, nor even his thoughts, homeward.

One night, in a fit of desperation, he pulled down his hat over his eyes, turned up the collar of his coat, and took his fiddle out into the streets. He was at the very end of his resources, and credit had given out. He had had no dinner that day, and supper he felt he could not forego. Even in London streets, where

so many incongruous things may be heard, playing such as his soon drew a crowd. Many stayed their steps, held by the weird magic of some Hungarian dances. "After all it is not alms," he said to himself, as he pocketed the contributions of his patrons; "I give good value for their coppers."

Suddenly he felt a touch on his arm, and looked round to see an old comrade at the college—a successful man who had done credit to his education.

"Good heavens! Redway, is it really you? What are you about?"

"Oh, it is a joke—a wager, don't you know—" He laughed a little unsteadily. He was very tired and awfully hungry, and his words failed to carry conviction.

"Oh, is it? Well, don't stay fooling out here in the cold any longer. Come home with me; my diggings are quite near here."

The light and warmth in Knowles's snug bachelor quarters were almost too much for the weary hungry boy. He turned giddy and sat down suddenly, laying his head on his arms on the table. His host let him alone while he busied himself getting out the whisky and tumblers from a corner cupboard, but by and by when he had been warmed and fed, proceeded to administer a sound lecture on the headstrong folly which had brought him to this pass, winding up with a promise to find him a berth on the morrow.

What Graham Knowles promised he was in a position to perform. He had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth—or at least with a conductor's baton in his hand. If not exactly as had been asserted of him, a born conductor, he was at least born a con-

ductor—a slightly different thing. For generations there had been bandmasters in the Knowles family, and Graham developed an aptitude at deciphering complicated scores, and a dexterity in wielding the baton that marked out his career from the first. Though but a few years older than Redway, he was already vice-conductor in a first-rate orchestra, and likely soon to succeed to the headship, so he had no difficulty in obtaining a post among the first violins for his less fortunate comrade. It was not long before Redway had made his way to the front desk, and as the two worked on together they became fast friends.

Theirs was an instance of friendship founded on dissimilarity, not of tastes but of capacities, for one supplied what the other lacked. Graham Knowles had an encyclopedic knowledge of classical music as well as a quick recognition of what was being written and done to-day, of who was really coming to the front, and who had a merely ephemeral popularity ; a strong business faculty too, a gift for organisation, and unerring judgment as to the capacities of those whom he employed, a wonderful *flair* for the public taste, and better still a knack of guiding it : every quality, in short, that should go to the making of an ideal concert director—except one. And the one thing needful —the inward grasp, the mysterious quality of interpretation which makes one man's rendering a revelation, while that of another is a mere echo—this gift of the gods was Roger Redway's. Knowles recognised it, and knew how to value it. Sometimes indeed a secret jealousy came up like a little cloud ; more often he rejoiced in his friend's power, for he loved him.

So the two prospered till the year when Knowles's health failed. There had been a trying winter : fog, sleet, all the misery of London in a sloppy January, combined with overwork, and Graham, never very strong, had had cold upon cold. He might easily have devolved some of his work upon Redway, but the disagreeable suspicion that it would be done as well or better in his absence made him cling the more obstinately to it. When summer came the winter cough would not yield ; he grew thin and irritable, complaining more of the heat than he had of the cold, till at last when August brought a cessation of toil, he was persuaded to go to a specialist. Redway had been absent for a fortnight, taking a well-earned holiday, and when he came back he found his friend in a mood of sullen silence and gloom. He bore with it a day or two, then after listening to an expression of cynical bitterness and dark hints of coming ruin, he broke through the fence of reserve with a direct question:

"Old man, what is the matter with you ? What's up ?"

"The game is up for me. I am done for."

"Done for ? What do you mean ?"

"I have to chuck up my appointment. I must leave town and lead a miserable valetudinarian existence in some warm climate—or die like a rat in a hole. It need not make any difference to you, though."

Redway leaned across—they were sitting each side of the fire ; it was a chilly September evening—and gripped the cold, clammy hand that hung down. His warm strong grasp seemed to put life into it.

"Well, go on ; tell me all about it. You have been

to Douglas Powell, I suppose, as I have been trying to get you to do for months. What else did he say ?"

"Oh, my lungs are all to pieces ; I am losing weight every day. I ought to get out of town before the winter. If I don't I must wear a respirator—never be out after four—all manner of rot. Dodge, I can't bear it ! It is too hateful—just as I was beginning to take hold and realise all we have talked of, all we planned."

"Poor old chap ! I don't believe it can be as bad as that, though. Give in for this one winter. Let the doctors have a turn, and you'll pull round and be as fit as possible next year, see if you don't."

"What will be the good of that, when I have lost my place in the hurly-burly ? If you cease to pull one instant, another has got hold of your rope and shoved you aside. No, I'll die pulling."

"Die ! Nonsense ! You must give yourself a chance. You will get in again, never fear ; you have interest."

"I believe if I once let go my work I shall die. I used to feel last winter as if the necessity of doing it was the only thing that kept me alive. I had sooner die at once and have done with it than creep about in a respirator on the sunny side of the way, dying by inches."

"I don't see," said Redway, "why you should not get work in some warm place or other. Surely there must be openings for musicians in some of those health resorts that people crowd to nowadays : the idlers who live in those places must needs want to be played to."

"Oh, I daresay, if I cared to do it ; but after all,

London is the world; if you don't make your mark there, you have not made it at all. No, I won't be buried alive. I know I could have a post at Pinecliff if I chose; my father was speaking of it yesterday."

"Better a living dog than a dead lion. What is the work?"

"Well, you know Pinecliff, which calls itself the Mentone of England, has musical ambitions beyond the average seaside place, and has built itself a concert hall in the style of a cucumber frame, specially adapted to the requirements of invalids and palms; and now it appears that nothing short of a bandmaster from town will content them; the appointment has been offered to me. Fancy me bandmaster of the Pinecliff band! I told my father I had not sunk so low as that yet. I should prefer a berth in the Brompton cemetery."

"You fool! Is it worse to be bandmaster at Pinecliff than to fiddle for coppers in the streets?"

"Don't, Dodge; you ought to forget that that ever happened."

"Well, I don't know. It had its uses—beyond the coppers, I mean."

He paused a minute, gnawing the ends of his moustache. "Now look here: Write and say you have thought better of it; you will accept on your own conditions. You must have a free hand to engage or dismiss whom you will—and make me your first violin."

"Dodge! You are not serious?"

"Never was more so in my life. We shall have our work cut out for us, no fear, but we will do it. Don't you see what a chance it is to begin in England the very thing that Germany is famous for?"

"Moonshine! The conditions are different. You know as well as I do the rubbish of which these local bands are made—tootling popular airs while the people read novels and chatter."

"We will change all that. We will create our band; we will create our public. The material for both lies ready to your hand. There on the one side stands a crowd of idlers, only wanting an opportunity to spend their shillings, and on the other, dozens of first-rate fellows eager to fill every berth you can offer. You know you can get your pick of men in town."

"Aye, for town, no doubt. They won't go down to a potty little place like Pinecliff."

"Pinecliff is coming to the front. Besides, your name will stand you."

"Perhaps, but not without money to back it. Where's that to come from?"

"Out of the ratepayers' pockets," said Redway calmly. "The good folk must understand that if they want to make their town attractive they must pay the price. Don't you see what a pull that gives you?"

"Upon my word, I begin to rather like the notion."

He smoked in silence for a minute, then turned to his friend:

"If I do this thing, Dodge, will you stand by me? Are you prepared to throw away the position you have won here, on the chance of our making a good thing of this? If you will not go with me, then I will not go."

And Roger answered, "I will go."

That was full five years ago, and the task the two had set before them had been abundantly fulfilled. The band which used to entertain the visitors as they

strolled on the pier or sat in the public gardens had been transformed into an orchestra of renown, the doings of which were chronicled in the musical papers, and the name of Knowles of Pinecliff had become known beyond his own country. To be enrolled in the Pinecliff band was the high ambition of many an aspirant. Many a first production took place in the little seaside town, and a new composer advertised with pride that his symphony or his suite had been performed there. The winter symphony concerts attracted crowds of music-lovers to the town, and the municipal authorities testified their sense of what Knowles had done for the place in very substantial manner.

There had of course been ups and downs—difficulties with the old band, jealousies among the new; tussles for mastery with the town council, who not unnaturally occasionally put the interests of the ratepayers before the cause of Music. Yet while sometimes the efforts of the two seemed "hardly one painful inch to gain," the tide of their success was flooding in, and now as they looked back on their five years' labour, they saw spread out behind them all that they had won.

Alone neither could have accomplished it; together they had been irresistible. Redway's sanguine courage had upheld his friend in moments of difficulty and depression; but if his clearer eyes could see to the end, in the details of the way Knowles was his superior. With greater calmness of temper, and infinitely better business faculty, and a perception of the need of proceeding by degrees, he succeeded where the other would have broken himself against obstacles, like a

wave upon a rock. If Redway had been in command he would probably have quarrelled with the town council in a month, and emptied the Palm-house by forcing the music of his own choice upon unwilling and uncomprehending hearers. Knowles, used all his life to catering for that great foolish public that fancies its taste rules the market, understood that it must be lured and coaxed with snippets of Geishas and Shop-girls, tamed by Sullivan and Cellier, till it could be brought to sit at the feet of Wagner and Tchaikovsky; that its judgment must be guided by well-written articles in the local paper, its vanity tickled by explanatory programmes with *leit-motifs* inserted in the text, till it could be led as with a ring in its nose.

It was slow work, but it was done, and an audience created of which any music director in Germany might have been proud; created too out of the very crowd who used to sit and chatter to the strains of the band, regarding it as a pleasant setting for the sound of their own voices, more cheerful than the beat of surges on the shore.

Meanwhile the sunshine, the sweet wholesome breath of the pines, the fresh sea breezes had done all that had been hoped for Knowles, and the strenuous work and absorbing interest had strengthened his grip on life which had begun to slacken. The cloaked figure with the scythe who had tapped him on the shoulder had gone his way for the present.

Adversity had held the two friends close; prosperity was perhaps loosening the bond a little. Helpful as the two natures were to each other, there were elements of discord. Redway had the conceit of a self-confident temper, happy in the successful exercise of

power, and seldom acknowledging defeat; Knowles, the sensitive jealousy of one aware of limitations he would not admit: jars were inevitable. And then the woman had come between.

IV.

Emily White was sitting listlessly on the window-seat in a very small flat at the top of a very high and hideous block of "mansions," with her hair pushed off her face, wearing a shabby old frock. Life seemed just then to have come to a sudden pause, but soon she must get up and go on again, for within the next half-hour Rose Alba must emerge, well-dressed and smiling, ready to sing her regulation three songs at a large "at home" on the other side of the Park, for which she had been engaged. She wished she were not Rose Alba, but merely Emily White, free to go to a party or stay away as she felt inclined.

The door opened and Ethel came in. She had type-writing work in a publisher's office, but had got away early in order to play her sister's accompaniments: Em hated strangers to play for her.

"What, haven't you begun to dress yet? You'll be late to a certainty; you know what a time you always take, and your hair all out of wave too. You look seedy; is anything the matter?"

"Who wouldn't look seedy under the roof in this heat? Of course my head aches, and I have been pushing back my hair. I must heat the wavers."

She got up and let the paper she had been reading slide off her knee.

"Had you better go, do you think? You won't do yourself justice."

"Oh, Brat, what a foolish thing to say! I have not climbed high enough yet to be able to afford myself airs and migraines. Of course I must go."

"Well, Colonel Armitage is sure to be there," said Ethel consolingly, "as it was he who got you the engagement."

"I suppose he will. By the way, did you see he is going to marry that Hope-Langton girl? I always thought he would."

"No! You don't mean—"

But Em was gone, and Ethel picked up the paper, and saw on the sheet that was turned outwards the announcement with the usual flourishes that a marriage had been arranged between Colonel Armitage, late of the —th Hussars, and Miss Euphemia Hope-Langton, niece of Lord Kilburn.

So this was it! No wonder Em had the stunned look of a person who has just fallen down-stairs. Among the many men who had paid court to the pretty little singer, this was the only one to whom, in her sister's opinion, she had ever given any real encouragement; the only one who could make her colour change, her look falter. Ethel recalled the flowers, the bonbons he had showered upon "the little white rose," as he called her, the chance meetings, then the planned ones; the day on the river, the little dinner at Earl's Court—all quite proper, of course: she herself had always played third; but she had wondered sometimes lately how long that phase was going to last, how soon he would declare himself and take Em off unimpeded by the presence of a chaperon. Now she understood the position in a flash. They were not of his world; he had only been "amusing himself."

There lay the sting. Em's pride must suffer: would her heart suffer too?

Ethel did not think her sister was a person of very much feeling; still if she had any, it had been touched by this man of the world, twenty years older than herself, whose cool assumptions and half-mocking tendernesses had been so great a contrast to the homage of which she had wearied. And if he had indeed been in earnest, how such a marriage would have satisfied Em's ambition! for he belonged to the very inner circles of that "society" on the fringe of which the doctor's daughters hung by virtue of the professional exercise of Rose Alba's talents.

When the singer appeared presently, if the pink in her cheeks owed something to the artistic hare's-foot, her sister did not blame her. She was wearing a dead white gown with a good deal of chiffon about it, and a large white hat, and white cheeks were not to be risked.

After all they were not late, and Colonel Armitage did not make his appearance till some time after they had arrived. Em was just going to begin her second song—"My heart is like a singing bird," when they caught sight of him in close attendance upon a fashionable-looking woman, plain, and of what people call a suitable age. Ethel's fingers faltered for an instant over the accompaniment, but Em's clear voice rang out with an abandon in the joyous refrain which she rarely showed.

"How nice to be as young and happy as that little thing," remarked Miss Hope-Langton, putting up her pince-nez.

Em wondered whether he intended to come and

speak to her; she was careful to give him no opportunity, and quite turned the head of the professional pianist who was her colleague.

As she and her sister left the house, she became aware of rapid masculine footsteps overtaking them. She thought he had left when Miss Hope-Langton did.

"Little White Rose, you were in charming voice this afternoon, do you know?"

He laid hold of the portfolio of music she was carrying, but she did not yield it.

"Don't trouble, thanks; we are getting into an omnibus almost directly."

"Why, I thought you always walked. I was going to walk back with you."

"It is too hot for walking, and I am tired."

"Poor little girl, you work too hard. When are you and your sister coming to Earl's Court with me again? We must have another pleasant evening before I go abroad. You know I have to go to the East in a few weeks."

"So I hear. By the way, I don't think I have congratulated you yet, have I? On your engagement, I mean. Of course we have known about it a long time, though we only saw the formal announcement today."

"Ah, Rose, I must tell you all about that some day. Civilised life is a complicated business for some of us, my child. Well, we can't go into it in the street, can we? Look here, when shall we have that little dinner, eh?"

"I think we have too many engagements just now, thanks. Unless—will Miss Hope-Langton be of the

party ? We should so much like to make her acquaintance."

An odd look came into his light eyes. "Aren't you rather mixing up things that don't belong ?" he said.

"No ; but I think you are. Ah, here is our omnibus. Good-bye."

"Ethel," she said to her sister later, "I have changed my mind about going down to Pinecliff. I think it would be an excellent thing to do, and the change would do me all the good in the world. I shall write to Maud Milton and tell her I will come after all. I don't suppose they will have made any other plan in the meantime."

"No, I should not think they had ; you only wrote the day before yesterday. It is the very best thing you could do," said Ethel with conviction. Then, after a pause, "I wonder if you will see anything of Mr. Knowles."

"Oh, I expect I shall. Plenty. At any rate I shall see the back of him and his waving arms if we go to the concerts. But perhaps we shan't ; the Miltons are not a scrap musical."

"She is taking it better than I expected," Ethel confided to her pillow that night. "How wise she is to go away for a bit. I should not be surprised if she married Graham Knowles after all ; and really she might do worse. I am certain he is desperately fond of her, and he is well off, and a good sort of man, I should think."

V.

THE room was silent, save for the rustle of a quick-turning leaf and an occasional sharp tap, but to the solitary occupant it was mazed with sound. Graham Knowles was going through the score of a new symphony, and as his eye followed the serried ranks of black dots on white paper, the inner ear, which is to the musician what the mind's eye is to the painter, was listening to a rare complexity of chords. As the artist sees the harmony of line and colour on the yet blank canvas, or the sculptor sees his statue in the block of untouched marble, so to him the silence was vocal with blare of brass, clear song of clarinet and hautboy, wail of violin.

It was a new thing of Grieg's that had just been sent him over from Norway, by special favour of the publisher whom Knowles happened to know. It had not yet been heard in London, and Knowles had a great desire to bring it out at his winter season concerts and get the start of rivals. It was newest of the new ; intricate in orchestration, mystic and elusive in meaning ; it needed that he should bend his whole attention to it not to miss the strangely interwoven threads of melody. But his mind was straying : a page or two went over in emptiness ; the eye alone took in the note, the inner voice was dumb. He pulled himself up and turned back again to the phrase of delicate beauty that had sent his fancy off on a quest

of something different from chords and progressions. It was no good ; that scrap of melody called up, by some subtle association, Rose Alba as he had seen her that morning on the pier. He left his desk and went over to the window.

He had not known till then that she was in Pinecliff, and he felt a little hurt that she should not have found means to let him know. But then to be sure it is not for a woman to make the first move, and perhaps she might have thought him remiss. How easily he had suffered himself to be thrust aside by Redway the other day ! Possibly she was annoyed with him. He would go to-morrow and call upon her, and try to recover the ground his jealous temper had lost him on that occasion. What a fool he had been to be so jealous, as though she were in the least likely to care for a fellow she hardly knew ! Besides, Roger's abrupt, overbearing manners were little likely, Knowles thought, to recommend him to so fine and delicate a creature. No, if she had for the moment seemed to favour Redway, it was but pique, because he himself, who had made her believe he loved her, had let his constitutional diffidence overwhelm him and thrust him back.

After all why should he be so diffident ? was it because he was plain ? Well, many a plain man has wed a fair woman before now—aye, and been loved by her too. As to looks, why there was nothing remarkable about his rival's that he could see—a good-looking enough fellow, as fellows go, that was all. And material advantages, as he reminded himself, were all on his own side : a good income, a good house, a certain prestige, while Redway— At this

point a small black serpent stole to his ear and whispered that Roger's prosperity—his very existence in this little world whereof he himself was king—depended on his will and pleasure ; he had it in his own hands to make or mar his friend's chances. He tried to turn a deaf ear, but the suggestion had been made.

That he should have to fight Roger for the coveted possession of this girl's love seemed so unfair ; Roger, who, as he had just been assuring himself, had all the disadvantages, and yet possessed the one advantage that outweighed them all—that mysterious "way with women" that he himself could never learn. He had never wanted to till now. He had often watched with a half-contemptuous amusement the scrapes his friend got in and out of with such a light heart. He himself had been singularly indifferent to women, but Roger's likings came so easily! surely to him it was just Emmie White or another. It would be all the same.

Then the fingers of his right hand stole up his other wrist and felt for something under the shirt cuff. Yes, he had a positive pledge of her favour; it was not for him to be distrustful. She had scorned his flowers, it was true, yet at that very moment he had been wearing her token secretly upon his arm. He had never taken it off since the day that she had laughingly put it there; he never would. He pushed up his cuff and let it slip down over his wrist: a little slender Indian bangle with a crescent and star hanging to it. He could see the slim white fingers that pushed it with difficulty over his hand, and remembering, he put his lips against it. It had been jestingly done, it was true, yet surely she must have meant it for a pledge.

She had never seen Roger Redway then. Could she be fickle? Nay, but did not women always seek to spur the favoured lover by pretending to encourage another? He must try to atone for his backwardness, must win his way with her by studying her tastes, humouring her whims, getting her the hearing she craved. So he mused, poor fool—like generals who win their battles on paper.

He went back to his desk, closing his ears resolutely against the haunting tones of Rose Alba's voice that strove to come between him and the complication of chords, progressions, modulations before him. It was a strange and intensely original composition, and continually the effect eluded him. Suddenly he caught himself wishing that Redway would come in, longing for his illuminating insight to make clear the obscurities. He had got into a fog; he was not sure after all that he liked the thing, not even sure that he quite understood it. He wanted to consult Dodge: they always went through new productions together, and Knowles felt helpless without him. He had his doubts about this; he questioned whether his orchestra, a small one though so perfect, was strong enough in wind. He should have to hire extra men from town if they gave it; or would Redway think an adaptation feasible? And then the audience: was his public educated up to it yet, or rather, could they be made to think they were? What would Dodge say about it? He had an enthusiasm for Grieg and a sanguine faith in the possibility of leading the public in the way that it should go. His own opinion wanted fortifying, and for a moment he thought he would go and look up his old friend. But no; though there had been no

overt quarrel between them, yet ever since the night of Rose Alba's first appearance in Pinecliff they had stood in mute antagonism to each other, and while that lasted Knowles felt that he could not seek his help or take counsel with him as of old. He must trust to his own judgment. He turned back to the First Movement, making pencil notes upon the margin.

Presently he heard the familiar quick decided step upon the stairs. He raised his head as the door opened and Redway came in. For a moment no greeting passed. The newcomer stood still at the other end of the table, one hand resting upon it.

"I have something to tell you," he said.

Knowles looked full in his face. "Then you need not," he answered, and a curious white look came about the corners of his mouth. He was not quick of perception nor versed in love matters, but he needed to be neither to read the love-light in Roger's handsome eyes or interpret the triumph veiled in a new shyness that sat oddly on his wonted self-confidence.

"What do you mean? You cannot have heard; I only spoke to her to-day. I came to tell you directly; I did not want you to hear it from any one but me."

It had been in his heart to say "because we have been friends," but something stopped the words. There was no friendship in the cold eyes that were staring at him.

He waited. The other did not speak, but looked down again at the score, and mechanically turned a page or two.

"Graham, won't you say something to me? Don't you understand? She—Miss White has promised to marry me."

Knowles looked up a moment from the book and straight into his eyes. "Traitor," he said, not loud, but with slow emphasis.

Redway drew nearer. "Do you think I am going to take such a word as that from you? By Heaven, you shall either justify it or take it back. Are you mad?"

Knowles had resolved that he would say no more, but the insistence of his antagonist forced from him—"I thought you were my friend. I brought her here; I introduced you to her, and you go about to rob me of the only woman I ever cared for."

"But this is sheer raving. Do you suppose because you happened to know her first, that gave you an exclusive right to her affection? Granted you had the start of me, but what then? We both admired her—who could help it? She liked me best. You must admit she was disinterested."

"Disinterested! The false-hearted flirt! She was mine till you stole her from me."

A chill seized on the bold confidence of the preferred lover. Was there indeed something that he had not known?

"Do you mean to say," he asked, sitting down, "that you were ever engaged to her? If so, in Heaven's name why didn't you tell me?"

"Engaged? No, I suppose not in words: it had not gone so far as that, but I believed she understood what I felt for her. I had made it as plain as I dared on so short an acquaintance, and I thought—I was convinced that she—she was not averse. When she agreed to come down and sing for me, there was an implication—Oh, I don't know! One cannot put

these things into words. I thought it only needed time. Surely you must have seen how it was."

"I saw you were attracted by her of course, but so was every man in the room. Honestly, I never did think it was you she favoured."

"She did, she did! But you came between with your infernal self-conceit, and turned her head."

"Upon my soul, Graham, I believe you have brooded over this till you don't know your own fancies from what really happened. You know you have never—"

The other interrupted by stretching out his wrist upon which the little bangle had slipped down into sight. "Did you ever see that before?" he asked.

Roger's face changed a little. "Of course I have," he answered; "I noticed that you wore it weeks back. It comes down under your cuff often when you are conducting. The fellows were joking about it last week. I had a good mind to ask you where on earth you got it, and why you were so deuced ostentatious with it, but you are never very communicative about your own affairs, and I hate prying. What is it to me?"

"Have you no curiosity to know who put it there?"

Roger waited in silence.

"She did—Emily White. Before ever she saw you."

It was Redway's turn to look pale and startled now. He hardly knew how to believe the assertion. He was not naturally of a jealous temper, for jealousy implies diffidence. He thought Emmie cold and difficult to win, and valued her favour all the more on that ac-

count ; this piece of circumstantial evidence staggered him and set all his conception of her awry. Till now he had been filled with an impatient contempt for a man who failed to win the woman he desired, and then whined because she was taken from him. No man pities another in such a case, and not even ruth for the old friendship kept him from feeling scorn. Now a horrible doubt lest he had himself been fooled came over him, and made him sick and cold. He walked to the window and battled with the suspicion a minute ; then he turned round.

"Graham," he said, "you must admit that the fault has been your own. If you had said to me, 'Dodge, I am going to bring down the girl I love and mean to win, and I want you to make friends with her for my sake,' I should never have dreamed of coming between. Perhaps I should never even have loved her. I don't know whether that is possible, but at any rate I would not have given myself a chance to get so deep in. I would have gone away—mastered it somehow. But she is mine now, and by Heaven ! no man shall take her from me."

It was honestly spoken, but it did not mend the breach. It is cold comfort to be told that your misfortune is of your own making.

"Well," said Knowles bitterly, "I wish you joy of her. But you are no friend of mine from henceforth. If you condone her treachery, you make yourself a party to it."

"I have yet to be convinced that that has been treachery on her part. I think you are deceiving yourself."

"Do you suppose," cried the other angrily, "that I bought that trinket and put it on my own arm?"

"I don't know what I think yet. I shall try to think nothing till I hear what she says."

He went to the door, but stood a moment with the handle in his hand.

"You and I have stood in together through rough weather and smooth, Gray; I don't like to think it is all up between us."

There was no response. The stiff figure remained standing with a cold question in his eyes as though he would ask—"Now all is said, why don't you go?" And he went.

As he slammed the front door he seemed to himself to be shutting off a good part of his life. It recalled to his mind that day, more than ten years ago, when he had shut the door of his father's house behind him. He had won, as he told himself he always did, that on which his heart was set, but he realised that he had had to pay a heavy price for it. Seven years' friendship for the love of five weeks—but he did not question whether it were worth it. If a man must leave father and mother, to cleave to the woman he has chosen, friends can hardly expect to be weighed in the balance. Nevertheless he went his way with a sore spot in the midst of his new joy.

What if either had known of the chance—a letter misdirected, an invitation unanswered—which had thrown success into the hand of the one and disappointment into the hand of the other? Was it blind fate?

Redway resolved that the revelations which had been forced upon him should sow no suspicion be-

tween him and Emmie : he would trust her entirely. He was not sure that he would even ask any explanation from her ; he fancied he could explain it all to his own satisfaction. Surely a man so shy with women, so unused to their ways as was Knowles, might build hopes on a very insecure foundation ; might completely deceive himself as to the value and significance of little things. He had seen them together, and had never observed the smallest sign of an understanding between them, and Emmie's way of speaking of the Conductor rather implied that she held him cheap. Yet the tangible evidence of the bangle was awkward, and after an uneasy, sleepless night, he resolved to have it out with her ; he would know no peace else.

It was the last day of her visit to Pinecliff. Next day she was to return to town to make preparations for the wedding, which he hoped might take place in a month—for he was an impatient lover. This last day was to be devoted to him ; he was to call for her and take her to a matinée at the theatre. During these courting days he had been perfectly reckless in his demand for leave of absence, and as both he and his chief considered the summer season of slight importance, it had been granted without demur, and his work devolved on the next man. That now it would be all scored up against him never occurred to him ; his own temper was too generous to understand any such proceeding.

He waited a minute or two in the drawing-room at the Miltons' house alone ; the cousins were in the secret, and had all gone out that he might have his fiancée to himself. He roamed restlessly about the room, feel-

ing it very hard that this first meeting as declared lovers should be overclouded by explanations; now resolving after all to hold his tongue, now realizing that he could never be easy while the idea of Graham Knowles and his claims stood between them like an unlaid spectre. The ring he had brought wherewith to seal his betrothal was in his waistcoat pocket: he had the fancy he would not put it on her finger till all was clear.

At last she came. He went to meet her and took her hand. Since they were alone she was surprised that he offered no further demonstration, though it was true yesterday she told him she hated being handled, and her dainty rufflings of lace and chiffon and her big picture hat would not lend themselves well to embraces. She looked in his face: it was graver than she had ever seen it.

"Love," he said, "should you mind giving up the theatre this afternoon, and coming for a walk with me instead? I want particularly to speak to you, and I can't there."

"But you could here, and we need not start for full five minutes yet. Have you got the tickets?"

She looked at herself in the big mirror that filled one corner of the room, and he could read in her eyes that she thought so exquisite a get-up would be wasted upon one man.

"Yes, I have the tickets. Well, as you will. I suppose what I have to say may be said shortly." He paused a minute, biting his moustache. He seemed to find a difficulty in beginning. As a rule diffidence was not in him, but either the newness of his engagement, or something in the unconcernedness and

aplomb of the little feathery-looking woman daunted him. At last he managed to bring it out with some abruptness.

"I want to know," he said, "whether you ever gave Knowles a bracelet of yours."

"And pray what business is it of yours if I did?"

"What business is it of mine!" he repeated. "Why, you are mine; everything that you do or are concerns me."

She laughed a little clear hard laugh. "It strikes me," she said, "that you are taking a great deal too much for granted. Pray how would you like it if I were to demand full confession about every woman you ever made love to, eh? To my mind there is something peculiarly despicable about a jealous man. So long as I give you no cause of complaint now we are engaged, you have no earthly concern with anything that happened before. Now let us start."

She moved to the glass and began to put on her veil, but he caught her by the wrist.

"Stay," he said. "I mean to have an answer."

She snatched her hand away. "So you would try to be masterful already! Let go my arm; you hurt me."

Yet the strong will imposed itself upon her despite her resistance, and she found herself adding, almost without her own volition: "It was nothing after all—a mere jest. It was a rubbishing trinket from Constantinople at Olympia or one of those places; I was fooling with my dog, putting it on his paws or some nonsense, and Graham Knowles asked for it. I gave it him in joke; he had no right whatever

to fasten any serious meaning on it. I never was engaged to him."

Roger was but half content, though this was just the sort of explanation he had hoped for. "I wish," he said, "that you had never made him think you liked him. He is a serious sort of fellow, and takes things to heart. You ought to have known what he would fancy."

These "oughts" affronted Em; she drew herself away from him.

"I really cannot understand this scene that you are making. It seems to me you are upbraiding me for not accepting somebody else. Your ideas certainly have the charm of novelty. The remedy is very simple. If you think your friend was first in the field and has the prior claim you can easily withdraw yours."

He turned round. "Em, Em! What are you saying?"

"I am suggesting that we put an end to a very ridiculous position."

"You don't understand. Can't you see that what upsets me is that you should have come down here, half engaged to him, and I was kept in the dark? You beguiled me into playing traitor to my friend."

"Beguiled you! Take care what you are saying."

"I did not need much beguiling? No, that is true. But if I had known—"

"Well, now you do know, you can play the heroic self-sacrificing lover if it pleases you—'Take her! She is yours!'—that is, so far as your own part of the bargain is concerned. I need not say I have no notion

of being taken whatever. But if you want to be off with me no one is keeping you."

He sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

"As if I could—now! Heart of my heart, do you think Graham or any man alive shall have you now?"

"Then I really don't see what all this fuss was about."

"Ah, can't you understand? You are mine—you are me: that you should deal treacherously with my friend is as if I had done it myself, or worse. Forgive me, my darling, if I seemed harsh. How can I bear that you should sully your whiteness— But you did it innocently; you did not understand what men think of these things."

He was kissing her passionately. She drew herself out of his arms.

"There, that will do. We shall be horribly late. You are so odd. I really cannot make out what you do want. It seems to me that if I were to ask for that wretched trinket back, I should only be admitting that it meant what it never did mean."

"Of course, of course! I want nothing but your assurance that you never loved him—never let him kiss you."

"Kiss me!" She made a *moue* of disgust. "I should think not indeed. How could you make such an insulting suggestion? You know I hate demonstrations of any kind. I only wish you would realise how much better I like you when you are not in these excited moods. I can't bear being mauled and mussed. Is my hat straight?"—as she crossed the room to look in the glass and draw the folds of her veil becomingly under her chin. "I hope to good-

ness," she added, "that you are not going to develop a Bluebeard kind of temper, for it is a thing I could not possibly put up with. If you set your heart on marrying a woman no other man had ever even wished for, you should have looked for a plainer one."

As he sat beside her in the dress-circle, and watched the laughable fooling of "My Friend the Prince" with grave, unseeing eyes, he was trying to take what comfort he could out of Emmie's coldness and hardness. If he could win so little tenderness from her, still less could any other man. If she had flirted it had not been for love, but for vanity. "Perhaps, after all," he said to himself, "the Turks have a truer view of life than we, and women have not any souls. Well, we must take them as we find them, for we cannot do without them."

VI.

Roger Redway mounted the steps of the Conductor's estrade and looked upon the little army assembled to do his bidding, every eye fixed on him, every bow suspended, waiting his signal. An instant he paused, for an outbreak of applause greeted his appearance. Did his vanity deceive him, or did his ear detect something a little warmer, a little more spontaneous than the customary civility ? Was there not a note of genuine pleasure when it was perceived who was to conduct ? At any rate he fancied so, and there was a gratified smile on his lips as he turned to the crowded house and bowed his thanks. Then he lifted his baton and a momentary silence fell till the grand rush of the finest of Liszt's Rhapsodies burst forth.

It was one of his good moments. There was nothing he loved better than playing on this great complex human instrument ; feeling all those forty individual wills moved like one by his will, and through them a power, mysterious, not to be defined, exercised over the crowd who sat listening, obedient, swayed as he would to mirth or melancholy, solemnity or triumph. He found in it the joy that one man finds in holding rudder and rope, and riding safe through a squall, making the rough waves his servants ; or another in subduing with light hand on the curb every motion of a high-mettled horse ; or yet another in manœuvring an army—in a word, the joy of mastery. Not

even his violin, the more intimate expression of his thought, could give him this special and peculiar delight.

Lately it had but seldom fallen to his lot: Knowles had grown more chary of suffering his friend to stand in his place, and had rarely failed in his own office ; but on this occasion he had been called to town the day before and had gone off in a hurry, leaving it doubtful whether he would be back in time for the Symphony Concert. The hour had arrived, and Redway had been punctual in beginning. It was rather a critical occasion, for the Rhapsody had gone so unsatisfactorily at rehearsal that there had been talk of changing it at the last moment ; but Knowles had gone off so suddenly, there had been no time to decide what should be done. Redway decided for himself : he disliked changing the programme, and he was not given to flinching from difficulties. Moreover he had his own idea of the origin of the one which had marred the Rhapsody, and he thought it would go right to-day. He felt in every fibre of him the peculiar intricate rhythm of the thing, and he knew in himself the power to impose his reading of it on the men under his baton.

He spurred, he urged, he held them ; the measure rose and fell like the measure of the waves, unequal yet with ever-recurring fall. At the end the applause broke out with vehemence, but he read his success still more legibly on the faces of the players, which reflected the joy of a work achieved. Then he saw Graham Knowles standing just within the little door at the back of the orchestra.

He just bowed his acknowledgments, paying no

heed to the insistent demand for an encore, and descended from the desk, silently handing the baton to his chief.

"Why did you not wait, or take the Suite first? You knew I was coming back."

"It seemed best to take the programme as it stood. As you did not arrive this morning I could not tell how long you might be kept."

He fetched his fiddle from the inner room and took his place, with something of the feeling a prime minister might have, who had been king for a day.

As Knowles took his way to the town by one of the winding paths that thread the steep side of the gardens, one above another, a scrap of conversation floated up to him through a screen of feathery sumach, from two of the performers who had paused for an instant just below. The speaker was the first double-bass, an Italian who had played under the batons of Richter and Mottl, and whose presence in the orchestra was an honour owed to the fact that ill health condemned him to Pinecliff. Knowles had an immense respect for his opinion and often consulted him. His companion was also a leading man. The first words were lost, but half a sentence came—"a wonderful piece of luck. If he had caught his train nothing could have saved us from coming to grief with that Rhapsody; he had not grasped it somehow."

"Aye. And Dodge is a born conductor."

"Still the boss is very good—admirable in some ways."

"Oh, yes, I don't deny it. He has an excellent beat—if you watch it. There is no need to watch Redway: you feel him in the very marrow of your bones."

Then they went on.

A week later, at the end of rehearsal, Knowles spoke to the leader. "Redway, I wish to speak to you in my private room."

"Very sorry—I am afraid I can't possibly stop now; I've a lesson at twelve thirty and it is now twenty to one. I'll come up to your rooms later—this evening if I can't manage it before."

Knowles drew his brows together and spoke in an authoritative tone: "I am afraid I must insist. The matter is one of importance. For your own sake you will regret it if you decline to hear what I have to say."

Redway shrugged his shoulders. "Infant," he said to a small white-faced lad who played among the second violins, and was now lingering with some curiosity on the pretext of collecting the music, scenting a row between the two heads—"just take a note for me to Brunswick Buildings, there's a good chap. I know you are always ready to oblige."

He scribbled a hasty line of apology, and followed Knowles into the little office at the back of the buildings where the Director transacted most of the business, engaged and dismissed subordinates, and served out reprimands as occasion might require. Redway was as much at home there as himself, could have found his way blindfold through the orderly confusion of the bureau, and knew exactly where every man and his qualifications were pigeon-holed together with his possible substitute in case of need. He had not been there for long—not since the coolness with Knowles had arisen; but it was a new idea to find himself summoned as a delinquent.

He came in not at all with the air of one, and since Knowles was in possession of the only chair in the room, seated himself upon the window-sill, leaning half out to snatch at some sprays of crimson rambler that were swaying in the breeze just out of reach. Knowles had begun opening some letters while he waited, and he finished reading them before he spoke.

"You must be aware, Redway," he said at last, looking up from the sheaf of letters in his hand—"you must be aware that for some time past your attendance, especially at rehearsal, has been most irregular. In view of this, with the winter season coming on, the council have resolved on making new arrangements." He paused, jotting down a few pencil notes on the margin of one of the letters.

"What do you mean?" said Redway. "Of course the winter season is another affair altogether, and I shall not shirk; but you and I have never thought much of the cheap-tripper patrons of August."

"You have been allowed—or have taken—a great deal more liberty than is usual in a subordinate, but you will find matters on a different footing in the future."

"Look here, Knowles, I don't understand this tone from you, and I'm not going to put up with it. You know very well that while Miss White was down here I naturally looked for a bit more leisure. She is gone back now, and you will not be asked to grant leave again until I demand a fortnight for the wedding. I make no apology and there's an end of the matter."

"An end? You will find it is only the beginning. On consideration of your unreliableness and my uncertain health in winter, the council have resolved that

the informal devolving of my work on you shall cease. It is not desirable that the Leader should also be Vice-Conductor; so the latter is to be made into a separate appointment, and has been promised to Dacre."

Redway started up. "Do you think I am going to play under the baton of that young prig? Not if I know it!"

"Very well. If you do not choose to submit yourself you have your remedy."

"And one I shall certainly take."

"You can do as you choose. I am simply the mouthpiece of the council."

"Talk of the council indeed! Do you think I don't know whose doing this is? And see through it too."

"It is nothing to me what you think. I am here to carry out the wishes of my employers. This is not a private concern." He rose and locked the bureau. "You had better take a day or two to consider," he said.

Redway laughed and went. He saw clearly the forces that had been at work. Meddlesome and annoying as members of the council had shown themselves on various occasions, he understood the workings of things too well to ascribe this new move to them; but it was bitter to him to believe that the man he had called friend, and for whose sake he had made the sacrifice of better chances than any he was likely to get now, was capable of thus going behind him to cut the ground from under his feet. Fate had seldom dealt him such a back-handed blow as this, and he was not sure that he was strong enough to defy all its consequences.

Defy it as far as in him lay, he certainly would.

He had his pupils, his prestige, to fall back upon; but it was one thing to rely on that while he had his fixed salary as a *point d'appui,* quite another to trust to it alone. His private work had been an extra which had emboldened him to ask Emmie White to share his fortunes; but now dare he venture himself—and her—on the sea of chance, trusting to his luck? He might make a good deal; but then he might fail, with Knowles working against him, as he could not doubt he would. What would Em think? Doubt on that head chilled him. There was a vein of practical worldly wisdom in her. Would she see in this shrewd stroke of fate a reason to postpone their marriage?—perhaps to give him up? What a hideous triumph for his enemy if she should! But submission was not to be thought of.

It galled him to know that a few years ago any concession would have been made sooner than that he should be lost to the Pinecliff band; he was indispensable. Now more than one of the men he had helped to train and form were capable of filling his shoes not discreditably, though, he might be pardoned for believing, less ably.

The next thing was to inform Emmie of the change in his fortunes. He must do it face to face; he could not write it. Next morning he sent in his resignation in form, coupled with a peremptory demand for leave for the day on business, and put himself in the train before it could be either granted or refused.

He had sent no word of his coming, so he was not surprised to be informed by the hall porter that the young ladies were both out and would probably not return for an hour or two—he could not say exactly.

So the impatient lover walked up and down the pavement in front of the unlovely block of buildings known as Bessborough Mansions, that he might catch the first glimpse of a returning figure. As he walked he revolved in his mind how best to tell her : now fancying himself taking her in his arms and asking whether she would stick to him whatever happened, now resolved on standing proudly before her and assuring her that she should be perfectly free.

A policeman who was on duty at the corner of the main thoroughfare became quite suspicious as an hour and a quarter went by, and excited to a pitch of lively interest by the time Ethel appeared at the opposite corner and ran to meet the stranger. He was a young man, new to the Force, and had not yet brought to perfection the impassive stolidity of his kind. He even pictured to himself, as an agreeable break in the monotony of daily duty, that that excited-looking young man might have a revolver secreted about him, or might possibly contemplate pitching the young woman out of one of the top windows of the flat into which they had just disappeared. He was really quite sorry to be relieved, and drew the attention of his successor to the flat in question as a place where something might be expected to happen shortly.

Ethel was generally the first to get home ; her office hours were regular and not very long, whereas Em's engagements sometimes lasted quite late.

"Why, Roger!" she cried at sight of him, "this will be a surprise for Em. Why didn't you wire that you were coming? We could have left orders to let

you in. Have you been waiting very long, you poor thing ? you look awfully seedy."

She ran up the long flights of stairs in front of him, for Bessborough Mansions did not boast a lift, and unlocked the door of their small sky-parlour.

"Poor boy," she said, "you must be tired and hungry. You shall have something to eat directly. We generally have a sort of tea-dinner when we get in if we aren't going out anywhere, and I get it myself, for we haven't any servant except for an hour or two in the morning. We have most of our meals out, you know."

She was bustling about while she talked, in and out of the neighbouring pantry, where a Beatrice stove betrayed its presence by an unmistakable odour. She would not accept the aid he offered, so he sat down by the window and looked round the untidy little apartment, trying to fancy what the life of the "bachelor woman" was like, and wondering whether Em would after all be relinquishing much. It did not look very luxurious, though comfortable in a free and easy way : there were plenty of hammock chairs, and a vague odour of cigarettes hung about them, an odour which made him uneasy till he recollected that the girls smoked themselves—at least his future sister-in-law did. Emmie seldom indulged ; it made her sick.

Piles of very untidy songs on the top of the cottage piano were the only distinct trace of his sweetheart, except his own photo stuck over the mantelpiece in a nickel frame. The room after all did not succeed in looking very mannish : there were plenty of the little rubbishing knick-knacks in which the feminine heart

delights, only no flowers but a few half-dead ones. These working women had not the leisure to keep their vases filled.

At last came Emmie, rather tired and very hot, and expressing so little joy at his unlooked-for arrival that his heart sank down, down.

There was nothing specially confidential about the communication he had come to make ; there was no reason why he should not have mentioned his changed prospects before Ethel, who took a most sisterly interest in the engagement ; but he could not, so she, noticing how poor an appetite he brought to the chops and coffee she had prepared, rose as soon as the meal was over, and said she should go and spend the evening with a friend and leave them to themselves.

After all he adopted neither of the two styles he had been rehearsing to himself all the afternoon, but told his story in bald jerky sentences, as he leaned against the window-frame, looking away from the listening figure swaying to and fro in the rocking-chair, and watching with curious intentness the lamps of a hansom, like two red eyes of some monster, crawling up the hill far below between the crowded roofs. He simply dared not look at Em, he was so horribly afraid she would be cruel to him, and he should have to go back beaten for the first time in his life ; and he felt as if he could not bear it. He had stood up manfully against every buffet of fate till now, but Em made a coward of him.

He ended his tale. Em leaned forward and laid her hand lightly on his coat sleeve. "What a detestable pig Knowles is ! Never mind, Dodge, we'll best him."

He laughed out, the relief was so great. "Em, Em! You are a brick. I didn't think you'd have taken it like this; I thought—I was afraid— There, I won't remember about it now."

He caught her in his arms and held her close. She lent him a cool cheek for a moment and then drew away.

"Now let's discuss things reasonably. There is no occasion to be emotional about it. I certainly don't mean to allow myself to be bullied by Graham Knowles, and I wonder you should. I thought you had more spirit."

"The dread of losing you made a coward of me, but with you I can face the world. No, don't draw away—I can talk things over much better holding you."

"Nonsense! You will do very well opposite. Well, what was I saying? Oh, yes, you know I have a little money of my own; not very much, still it will keep the wolf from the door, and if you and I both put our shoulders to the wheel—"

"My darling! I don't mean that you shall work."

"Perhaps not, but I mean it; in fact I have never meant anything else. Your notions, my dear, are by no means up to date. I have my profession as well as you, and I don't see why I should relinquish it when I marry any more than you should yours."

"I hate the idea of letting you exert yourself. A man should be able to keep his wife, or he has no business to have one."

"Very well," said Emmie, "have it your own way, and play into Mr. Knowles's hands by putting off our marriage—for a year, shall we say, or two?"

"Em!" he cried, "you have got me at a disadvantage."

"I may as well tell you candidly," said she, "that I never had the smallest intention of giving up my singing."

"I should not have minded your singing at concerts if you liked; it is your having to grind at the drudgery of lessons that I hate."

"But you are in a cleft stick, you see; so you had better give in with a good grace and be thankful."

His thankfulness would fain have expressed itself with ardour, but he held himself in bounds and only carried her hand to his lips.

"Well," he said, "if needs must, I can get you plenty of pupils in Pinecliff."

She made a face. "To my mind the bright side of the disaster is that it sets you free from Pinecliff. Why stay? Why not come up to town and make a fresh start? I believe I am beginning to catch on at last, and it seems really a pity to drop it."

He shook his head. "I have lost too much time there already. I could not slip into my place where I dropped out of it five years ago; I should have to go to the end of the queue again. You know I am nearly thirty. The work I have been doing will have told down there; but here, who knows me? For one pupil I might get in town, I can command ten there. There I stand first; here I should be one of a crowd."

She gave up the idea with reluctance. She loved London, and her own special ambition would be further off fulfilment. However there was reason in what he said, and Em was an eminently reasonable little person.

"After all," she said, "the business has its compensations. You will be a free man and your own master, and if you get your time well filled I think you may be the richer."

"To be sure I shall be. It was a tremendous fag, morning, noon, and night; I got precious little time to myself. If I seemed beaten down at first, it was only because of you, and now you have put courage and hope into me. All the world may fail me so long as you don't."

He had to bid her good-bye then, and hurry to catch the mail train. As he sat dozing in his corner, with his cap pulled down over his eyes, the jarring rumble of the wheels kept telling him over and over and over again that Fate might do as she would; he was the happiest man in the world.

VII.

After a week of storm, such as not seldom follows the halcyon weather of August on the south coast, the sea lay in the sunshine, dimpling, glittering, enticing, with the seductive smile of a treacherous woman; though one who knew its moods might be warned by the bars of purple shadow that slowly crossed the surface, and the low ominous murmur that ran along the shore. There were no "white horses" to break the glassy smoothness, and the wind seemed to have lain down to sleep, pillowed on that gentle-seeming heave. "What a calm morning after the storm of yesterday," remarked the unwary.

Redway knew it well enough in all its moods, and knew too that his strong stroke would be a match for the undertow. He was a good swimmer, with an inborn passion for the sea. He never patronised the bathing-machines which stood in long ranks on either side of the pier for the behoof of the visitors, but went down in the early morning, along under the cliff to the eastward. He was speeding down the hill, his towel slung over his shoulder, past a row of bow-windowed lodging-houses, when he heard himself pursued by flying feet, and a breathless voice after him—"Mr. Redway! Mr. Redway! Oh, do stop for me! Mother says I mayn't bathe this morning unless you would let me go down with you. I have been looking

out for you ever since six o'clock. I won't be a bit of bother, really. Some fool has been telling the Mater there is an undertow, or some rot."

"Come on then; but it is quite true there is a heavy ground-swell this morning. You must mind and do as I bid you if you come."

Redway was fond of the small fair-haired boy whom he had taught and trained. The child had made his appearance some seasons ago at the Palm-house as an infant prodigy on the violin. He was thirteen now, and beginning to outgrow his Eton jackets and turn-down collars, and being less and less of a phenomenon the older he grew, had now taken his seat among the second violins, and made himself generally useful with triangles or cymbals or whatever might be required in that line; he quite regarded himself as the most indispensable person in the orchestra, next the Conductor and the First Violin. For the latter he entertained a warm boyish devotion, and had solemnly threatened resignation when the breach took place between Redway and the chief. Redway was touched by this proof of fidelity, though he had laughed at it and told the boy he would do him no good, and would certainly damage his own prospects, which he could not allow.

A pile of clothes and a head bobbing about in the middle distance showed that another bather was already in possession of Redway's favourite nook, and he thought he recognised the doubled-up gray hat as the headgear Knowles affected. They had avoided each other carefully of late. "Still, I should hope the sea was big enough for both of us," Redway remarked to himself, as he deposited his garments at a little distance.

"Look here," he said presently, after he had given the boy a lesson in side swimming and let him dive off his shoulders a few times, "I am not going to paddle about in the shallows all the morning looking after you. I am going for a good stretch before I go in, so you must give me your word you won't go out of your depth, and don't stay in too long."

He went off in an oblique direction as well to avoid an encounter with Knowles as to minimise the force of the current he would have to meet in returning. He looked back once to shout—"Are you all right?" to his small companion, and then was lost sight of in the trough of a billow. The waves were stronger and more buffeting than they looked, but it only increased the pleasure he found in mounting one after another, and he went further than he had intended. He was coming in, and had turned over on his back to rest, a position which gave him little view of anything but sky and advancing crests, when he thought he heard shouts. At first he fancied it was only the boy, larking about, when a more desperate cry made him turn over and swim his fastest. A moment more and he saw Bertie signalling wildly and pointing out to sea.

"That fellow out there!" he shouted; "I believe it is Knowles—he can't get on; there's something the matter. He can't mean to go out again like that, and just now he threw up his arms and yelled. Ah, now he has gone under."

"Where?" cried Redway; "I don't see him."

"Ah, there he is again—more to your left. He is drowning, I am certain. I don't believe I could get to him; besides, you made me promise not."

"Don't you try; you'd be no good. Run along the

beach and get a boat out in case I can't get him in. I'll go."

The current was setting strongly eastward, and going out was quick work, yet somehow it almost seemed as though the drifting man were travelling faster than the swimmer. Yet no; he certainly gained upon him, and he could presently see that though he seemed to have lost the power of swimming he was still keeping himself afloat for the most part, though now and then he rolled helplessly over.

Redway shouted to him with all his strength: "Clasp your hands behind your head and lie still till I come."

Evidently he was being sucked out by one of the strong currents that make that coast so peculiarly dangerous, and feeling himself unable to make way against it, had been seized by a paralysing fear. He had already sunk twice, but seeing help approaching, became calmer and began to keep himself afloat with more ease. The tremendous ground-swell added considerably to the difficulty, as the waves came riding in in lofty ridges, one behind the other, swamping now the floating one, now the rescuer, and hiding them from each other.

Roger breasted them steadily as they came, sometimes rising over the crest, anon compelled to dive through, and feeling each successive effort take more and more from the breath and strength he would presently need to stem the tide. The great breakers which had but now seemed like rough playfellows, had turned into menacing dangerous brutes that must be mastered for his life.

Now at last he was getting into the smoother water

far out beyond the break, and made better way; but Knowles, seeing help was near, unclasped his hands and trying to strike out, rolled over, lost his head, and began to struggle wildly. Once more he flung up his arms, and Roger saw the silver bangle gleam upon his wrist. At sight of it a rush of hatred surged up in him towards the man who had so lately taken a mean revenge upon him. Why was he doing this? Why spend his strength in saving one who had done him an ill turn? Why not let him drown? He had sacrificed to him already five years of his life and its best chances; must he sacrifice his life itself? For he felt pretty sure now that that was how it must end. It was only a question whether one should drown or both. He could reach him now, it was true, but the chances were that in the condition the sinking man was in now, he would clutch, cling to, probably throttle his would-be rescuer. His own strength was already ebbing, and the going back would be none too easy alone.

His strong young manhood cried out against death. At eight-and-twenty life is very sweet, and he was to be married next week. Must he drown in sight of his untasted bliss? He took one stroke to turn. The smiling blue sky, the sunny cliff called him back; a bitter despairing cry from the man he was forsaking called him on. He set his teeth hard. After all a man must die some day; better to die doing the straight thing than to live disgraced. He put his back into the next few strokes, and in a moment more he had arrived.

"For God's sake don't clutch me!" he cried. "Lay your hands lightly on my shoulders and I can

manage. Strike out with your feet a bit if you can," he added presently ; "it will help us on."

"Oh, thank God!" gasped Knowles. "I thought you were going to leave me to drown when you saw it was I."

"Don't talk. Save your breath."

For awhile Redway wondered if they were really gaining round, or if he were spending his strength for naught. Yes, surely the shore seemed a little nearer than it did, and he took new courage. The waves carried them forward on their crests as they approached the shore, and by fighting with all his might against the undertow he contrived to hold his own. At length he saw the boat putting out, but by that time they were gaining the shallows ; a few more strokes, and they would be able to wade in.

Just as he was thinking that his task was almost done, the hands on his shoulders became as lead, and his head went down. His eyes were open, and he could see the clear green crystal walls closing him in. His breath was stopped. A strange fancy went through his mind that he had failed to do his duty, and he was sinking down, down to hell, with Em's white arms throttling round his neck, and he could not loose them. His fingers grappled desperately among the shingle at the bottom ; then for a minute he lost himself.

It was but momentary ; the next thing he knew he was being hauled over the side of the boat, and for an instant he lay still at the bottom, mazed. Then he sat up and shaking off the unconsciousness as he shook the water out of his eyes, he asked, "What is it? What on earth has happened?"

What had happened was very simple, though it might easily have been fatal. So long as he was swimming in deep water the buoyancy of the waves helped to keep his burden afloat, but so soon as he reached the shallows near the shore there was not water enough to support the weight, and the pressure of Knowles's hands on his shoulders plunged his head under water at the moment that he was too much exhausted to be able to resist, and quite unaware that he was not still out of his depth. It takes but a foot or two of water to drown a prostrate man, and it was lucky that the boat was by that time close at hand.

Knowles had already waded ashore, and stood waiting at the edge as Redway got out, trying to utter some incoherent and ungracious-sounding thanks. For a man to whom effusiveness is difficult it is almost impossible to express himself on such an occasion, and such a one will give thanks with more apparent gratitude for the loan of a pocket-knife than for the gift of his life.

He paused, stammering, dumb, with all he wanted to say unspoken. Then suddenly he wrenched the silver trinket from his arm, snapped it in two, and flung the bits far into the sea. In the sunlight they whirled and fell, then sank, tossing up a shower of glittering spray. The eyes of both men followed them without speaking, and those of the boy were round with amazement. Then they parted and went their several ways up the beach to their clothes.

Roger clapped Bertie on the back. "Hullo, old chap, what is the matter with you? We are both all right, you see. You won't have to weep over either of our funerals."

"I can't help it," snuffled Bertie, who was quite overcome now it was all over. "It was so horrid, and I did think you were drowned."

"To tell you the truth, so did I for the moment. I did not realise we had got into such shallow water that we might have stood. Those shingle banks are very puzzling. It would have been too ridiculous to get that far and then make a mess of it. I was precious glad you were there."

"Then I was a little use."

"To be sure you were. There, there, cheer up and hurry into your clothes, there's a good chap. I want you to trot off and see if you can't get us a drop of brandy. I am shaking so I can hardly put anything on, and Knowles seems as bad," as he looked across to where the other was languidly creeping into his garments.

While the boy sped off to do his errand, Roger lay down half dressed upon the sand, realising now that it was all over, how near death he had been ; how near missing the happiness his heart was straining after. Wearied with a long swim as he had been already, his achievement had reached the extreme limit of the possible : another half dozen yards and he must have failed, and then— Where would he have been on this sunny summer morning ? Where and what ? He wondered with a shuddering sense of mystery and awe, then covered his eyes and gave thanks for his escape.

When he looked up Graham Knowles was standing beside him, very white and shaky still.

"You are utterly done up," he was saying with compunction.

Roger sat up. "Oh, I am all right; a bit breathed and tired, that's all. I have just sent the Infant for a pick-me-up; you want one as much as I do."

Knowles sat down and began throwing little pebbles about. "I tried to thank you," he began awkwardly; "I couldn't somehow—words seem so impotent and unmeaning. I hope you believe I am grateful."

"Oh, that's all right; we'll take all that for granted. Don't bother to say anything; there's no occasion."

"But I must just say how awfully ashamed I am. I did not act straight by you. I pretended to myself that I was doing the right thing; but I saw it horribly clear out there just now. It was my cursed jealousy. I could not forgive you for—I can't now; it is no good pretending. Still, if I could reinstate—"

"No, certainly not—thanks! Things can't be put back. What is done is done. This makes no real difference."

Knowles went on tossing pebbles down into the brim of the sea; then he spoke again:

"Do you know I had a horrible, ghastly fancy that when you saw it was I you would not come to me—that you meant to punish me by leaving me to drown."

"Don't!" cried Redway; "it was too hideous. It is true I nearly left you. You see how little you have to thank me for."

"Nay, I think I owe you ten times more. If I had been in your place—" He paused: "It is very awful to think what one is capable of. Ah, here comes the Infant. I shall not be sorry for something to pull me together; I own to feeling rather faint."

They walked up the hill together, the boy clinging to Redway's arm, and wondering what had passed between the two in his absence and whether the upshot would be a reconciliation. At the corner the two men parted with a cool nod, as though they had only been sharing the most ordinary swim.

When Knowles had gone, Bertie rubbed his cheek against Roger's sleeve with the coaxing action of a young calf. "I say, you won't tell any one about me, will you?"

Redway laughed; the boy's little share in the event seemed so unimportant.

"Why," he said, "is your valiant little soul reproaching you for not doing more than you could? You did as you were bid, and that was all I wanted."

"Oh, I know I couldn't have saved him. I only meant I made such a fool of myself after. I couldn't help it; it was so splendid somehow."

Roger laughed again and patted his shoulder. "Well, suppose you come in to breakfast with me, and by that time there will be no red eyes to be accounted for." Presently he added, "If I keep your secret, you must keep mine. I saw you were watching when Knowles pitched something into the sea: I want you not to say a word about that."

"I won't, of course; but I could not help seeing what it was. Why, I've seen that bangle on his wrist lots of times when he is conducting; it slips down when he waves his left arm. I did so want to ask you what it meant. I won't breathe a word."

"I can't tell you anything about it. Simply I want you to keep a silent tongue in your head. Can you?"

Bertie nodded. "Trust me," he said.

VIII.

They had been married a fortnight. Their wedding-journey had been brief perforce, since lessons had become of paramount importance, and must in nowise be neglected. Their ten days had been divided between Paris and Étretat—Em's choice, of course. It was but a glimpse—the outer husk of Paris, so to speak, seen, as the hasty tourist sees it, from halfpenny chairs under the trees in the Champs Elysée; but Paris is always Paris to the outsider, even out of season. The days passed pleasantly enough: little dinners at the Palais Royal, evenings at the theatre or some *café chantant*, mornings of shopping and sightseeing, just suited Em; she was pleased with everything, amused and amusing, never tired, never bored. Then five days at the most entertaining of French watering-places, and so home.

Her choice of a honeymoon journey was probably wise. Solitude *à deux* to start with is often too great a strain on new untried relations, but Roger began to feel that he had never yet really had his wife to himself; he wanted to carry her off into the country, away from other eyes, and realise his own happiness. No sooner had they been settled at home than Emmie's cousins and the people they introduced began to buzz about them, and when he came in from his afternoon's work he generally found his wife entertaining a roomful at tea. He was well pleased that it should be so: he did

not want her to be dull, and as she shrewdly pointed out, the more they got known the better for their chances of work; still he wanted to have a turn himself. Saturday was his free day, and he put forward his own claims.

"I want you to come out with me this afternoon."

"All right. Where shall we go? There is a matinée of 'The Idler' on to-day, I believe; but I have seen that twice."

"No, no: we've had enough of that sort of thing for the present. I want a change. I am going to carry you right off into the country."

"We might make up a little party, and go to the New Forest if you liked. There's a char-à-banc goes at two—or we might bike. The Miltons would go, I know, and so would the Aldersons."

"Oh, I don't want a parcel of Miltons and Aldersons: I want just you—for once. I am going to take you to one of my pet places, where you have never been."

Em made a little *moue*. "Out in the wilds, I suppose, where there is no getting a cup of tea."

"Well, we can take that precious tea-basket of yours. I'll act beast of burden."

Em laughed. "There is a vein of inconvenient and inappropriate sentiment about you, Dodge, that crops up in unexpected places. Haven't you learnt that I hate the country?"

"But I don't, and I am going to teach you to like it," he answered, with the sublime faith of the new-married man in his wife's teachability.

Roger's love of the country was a deep-rooted thing and belonged to the days when he had paddled bare-

foot in the silvery shallow streams that intersect the green meadows on either side of Dronechester, fishing for minnows, or tramped over the wide-rolling downs that hem the old city round, to the hazel coppices in the hollows, bird's-nesting with other naughty boys. An English boy who is country-bred never quite loses the home feeling of it, and it claimed Roger on another side as well. He must perforce live in a crowd, for what should a fiddler do in the wilds, with no one to fiddle to—unless, like Orpheus, he could make the rocks and woods respond? In the main, town-life suited him; he must have his public and the stimulus of busy life around him; but his artist nature had need sometimes of great spaces of silence; of lone places where his fellow men and all their works should not come between him and the great World-spirit. Sometimes at Pinecliff, hemmed in with that endless succession of prosperous, prosaic villas, he felt crowded, stifled, as if he could not go on for ever giving out without taking in; and then nothing would do but he must go over the hills and far away.

The sea at Pinecliff, dotted with pleasure-boats, fringed with bathing-machines, was no doubt a large salubrious expanse of water, but it had no message for him; he must get away to where the lofty headland ran out between the river and the sea, flushed with heather, golden with gorse, shut away from the town by the great stretch of solemn pinewoods that belonged to the Tristerwood estate. Down there the waves lapped upon a desolate tawny shore, and the sea-birds wheeled and screamed unmolested. There was an influence there that he felt without being able

to give any account of it. He thought he need only take Em there, and she would feel it too. He wanted to get nearer to her. The courting days had been so brief, the honeymoon so packed with new sights and experiences, that they seemed to have been living on the surface ; he wanted to begin the real life now.

They started on their expedition in bourgeois fashion on the top of an omnibus, for the way he meant to take was impracticable for the bicycles ; then, alighting at the easternmost suburb, came by a short cut and a gap in the fence, right into the Tristerwood enclosure. They were trespassing of course, but what of that ? At least there was no barbed wire.

After the sunny streets, the shop-fronts, the rattle of the 'bus, it was like entering a church. They were looking down a long dim aisle of russet columns with a dense roof overhead, through which the sunlight filtered sparingly. The trees stood in the midst of a sea of bracken, turning golden and bronze with the touch of the first cold autumn nights, and the path on which they trod was carpeted with tawny pine-needles. There seemed no bounds to the place : the aisles were lost in faint blue haze through which the sun struck slantwise, writing golden arabesques on the red tree-trunks. It was still, with the hush that belongs to great pinewoods—a hush which enfolds so many scarcely noticeable sounds—the light crackle of a dry branch, as a squirrel flashes from one tree to another, the soft fall of a cone he lets drop in his hasty flight, a rustle, infinitely faint, where a weasel slides through the bracken and gambols across the path-way, the sleepy croodling of the wood-pigeons, and

like it, only vaster, the ever-recurring murmur of the waves as they wash up along the shore.

It put Roger in mind of the long nave of Dronechester Cathedral, with its ranks of lofty pillars losing themselves in the dimness above, with its mystic shadows, its filtering sunlight. He looked round at the slim, white, bridal-looking figure beside him, and it seemed to him as though they were moving side by side up some great solemn church towards an unseen altar. He could not put the notion into words, but his hand sought his wife's.

She broke into a little run. "Oh, come along!" she cried. "Let's make haste out of this dismal old wood. It's like the dreadful enchanted forests of the nursery tales, and it seems to have struck you dumb. Who would believe that the sun is shining outside, and the wind blowing too?"

She snatched her hand away, and skimmed along in front of him, and he was fain to follow laughing.

"There, didn't I tell you?" she called back to him presently over her shoulder; it is an enchanted wood, and I have found the enchanted castle, buried in the heart of it."

She had reached a high oak paling, topped by a tamarisk hedge, and was peeping through.

"No," she cried, as Roger tried to get a view over, "you'll see nothing that way; it is no use being proud. You must kneel right down and put your eye to this knot-hole, and you will see a fairy picture."

It was like a peep-show: a wide garden ablaze with flowers, a stately terrace with a broad flight of steps flanked by stone vases overflowing with colour, a pea-

cock sunning himself on the balustrade, and an Italian-looking house for a background.

"Ah," said Em with an envious sigh, as she got up from her knees and flicked the bits of moss off her white frock, "that is the sort of house I should like to live in. Who are the happy folk that dwell there, I wonder."

"Not so very happy, by all accounts. My pretty one, I wish I could ever hope to put you in such a nest."

"But who are they? And why do you say they are not happy?" she asked as they walked on.

"Because they have not the one thing they want. The place belongs to a Sir Hervey Gilderdale, a man of very old family, enormously wealthy, which old families in these days seldom are, and his sole desire was for a son to inherit it all. The only son is a dwarf and imbecile; so you see there is a crook in their lot."

"A good deal to gild it though. I think I remember seeing Sir Hervey that time I came down to sing at the Palm-house. I heard him saying things about me, so I asked Mr. Knowles who he was. He had a fair-haired woman with him. Was that the wife?"

"No, I think not; I believe she is an invalid. He is a great patron of music and awfully good to Knowles. The Palm-house owes him a good deal."

A little further, and they came out of shadows onto the low cliff where the sun shone and the wind combed the long yellow bents away from the sea, and the stone-chats whisked cheerfully from one furze-bush to another. The slopes above the river were all golden with sheets of corn-marigold, and beyond them the

old gray minster of Ebbchurch brooded over the marshes. On one side of the headland the river broadened to a lagoon, then narrowed, forcing its way between the sand-banks that fenced the mouth, watched over by a tumble-down ferry-cottage and an ancient inn of evil repute in the old smuggling days. The gnarled scanty trees that came down in single file from the further shore must have witnessed wild doings in their time, but now the whole place seemed gone to sleep, half buried in golden sand.

"Well," said Emmie, "we can't go much farther at any rate; we seem to have come to the end of all things. And pray how do you propose to boil the kettle in this gale?"

But Roger knew his bearings, and presently had found a deep cleft, looking seaward but sheltered from the wind, where Em could unpack her tea-basket and butter the scones while he watched over the vagaries of the kettle.

Nothing but sea and sky all round; above, a blue in which thought might lose itself; beneath their feet, the oncoming of wave after wave curling over, with tender green shadows under the creaming foam, every one different, yet every one on the same plan through all the infinity of change. When tea was over Roger lay down on the cushiony withered ling, his heart singing to itself something which by and by his fiddle should interpret; something that should have the beat of the infinite ocean in it, and yet be filled with a measureless content.

Em was fidgeting about with her tea-things, wiping cups and thriftily packing away superfluous cakes. He held out his hand to her when she had finished.

"Come here a minute, wife, and sit by me."

She came, and presently his arm went round her and drew her close. It was one of those moments that come but rarely, when our desire seems attained, our hand just closing on the coveted good, and we admit that truly God's world is fair. The sense of happiness wanted to find expression, but the words when they came were banal enough.

"My darling, are you happy?"

She moved a little restlessly. "Oh, I am well enough, but don't you think we ought to be moving? One gets cramped sitting on the ground; and just supposing any one were to come by! We should be taken for the worst description of cheap tripper."

His arm loosened, and she slipped away and went to the edge of the cliff, looking back to where Pinecliff lay under its pall of smoke. He did not speak, and in a minute she turned to him again.

"It is awfully pretty here, but you know I think it was a mistake coming by ourselves; it would have been better fun if we had brought the Aldersons."

He had drawn himself up into a sitting posture with his hands loosely clasped round his knees. As he watched his wife standing at the edge, her light, graceful figure in a stiff white piqué skirt sharply outlined against the blue, her pretty profile turned towards him with a slight discontent, a sudden sense of hopeless aloofness came over him, a sort of revelation of the absolute solitude of every human soul. After all, she was an utter stranger to him: three months ago he had not known of her existence, and now what did he know of her? All through his hasty courtship he had believed in the day when she would be his very own;

but now—if these two weeks would not bring them together, then nothing ever would.

. . . . . .

Em, like most girls, had been well pleased to sport with the little butterfly-winged Cupids who come all wreathed with roses and blue ribbons, like old-fashioned valentines; but when Love came, full-grown, with crimson overshadowing wings and grave eyes that frightened her, she shrank reluctant. It was all very well to be wooed with compliments, presents, flowers, caresses, and easy enough to respond with favours, now granted, now withheld. But now all was changed; her maiden's crown and sceptre were laid aside, and the exacting demands of her husband's love wearied and repelled her. He thought his wooing was all done, when it was in truth but begun. Would he have patience and comprehension for the task?

Nevertheless on the surface, which is where we all live most of the time, all went well. The curtain which had been lifted for an instant before Roger's eyes was let down again almost immediately. The daily familiarity soon hid the inner strangerhood.

. . . . . .

They were both soon hard at work. Redway was labouring to extend and secure his connection, and set it on a firm basis above dependence on the breath of popular favour. Just now he was on the crest of the wave: he had always been much liked, and his sudden dismissal set rumour afloat by no means to his discredit; followed as it was by his marriage with the pretty soprano, a touch of romance crept into the tale, and he became quite the fashion. Em too profited; a nobody in town, she was a star in Pinecliff, and she

admitted that her husband had been wise in refusing to go back to London and begin all over again, put back five years in the race.

Manlike he was rather reluctant to let her work ; it did not sort with his notions of the fitness of things, but the wisdom of it was evident. The minute housekeeping of their little *ménage* could not possibly occupy her time, and to give a few singing lessons every day, with occasional engagements for "at homes," kept her busy and content. It rather annoyed her that her husband's quarrel with the Conductor should prevent her appearing at the Palm-house ; still private parties suited the calibre of her voice better, and pleased her by taking her into a society she would otherwise hardly have entered, where her pretty face and charming personality, no less than her taking style of singing, always found her friends. She liked the smart world, even on sufferance, and her tact, as well as her husband's pride, stood them in good stead, and enabled them to hold their own in houses where they appeared professionally.

She thought her cousins and their circle of acquaintance dull, and failing the big world, much preferred Roger's musical friends, though she might sniff a little at the wives of some of them. She had had enough of the provincial society of a country doctor's daughter ; the life of a bachelor-woman in town, such as she and Ethel had had a taste of—the life of latch-key, restaurant meals, and cigarettes—was the one that appealed to her ; the life of movement, of colour, of people who worked—journalists, actresses, painters, players—was the one she hankered after, and she made herself very pleasant to the Bohemian people,

often foreign musicians, her husband sometimes brought to the house.

Roger was immensely proud of her—of her cleverness, her skill in managing to make their little income go so far, and giving an artistic air to all their surroundings ; of the way she contrived to look the best-dressed woman in a crowd at a minimum of cost ; of the wonderful social aptitudes which made her inexperience a match for the most practised woman of the world. He admired, too, the dexterity with which she discussed everything, and appeared to have read everything, though the facile way in which she overturned traditional convictions sometimes staggered him. A man who read little and thought less, his faith had undergone no shaking ; the mould into which his beliefs had been poured had never been broken. After the first movement of astonishment, Em's modern views left him quite untouched : he had not command of tongue to argue or refute ; they simply rolled off him, and his wife reflected what a *borné* intellect she had married.

In one only gift of hers, he seemed not to take the pride she conceived to be her due.

"You never appreciate my singing, Dodge," she said discontentedly one day as they left a party. "It is very strange. Far better judges than you think a lot of it. A man said to me this evening I really ought to go on the stage. Why are you always so grudging about it ? One might really imagine you were jealous."

He laughed, and patted the hand that rested on his arm.

"Fancy being jealous of my wife ! I might as

well be jealous of my own nose. No, there are things that suit you, and there are things that don't. You have such an unerring instinct for the becoming in gowns, I wonder you have not for songs."

"How absurd! I can't always sing the same old things just because you took a fancy to them at first, and don't care for anything else."

"As to your going on the stage," he went on, "I simply could not spare you, and I don't think you in the least estimate what the training and the grind would be. I don't believe you could stand it."

"What rubbish! When you know how strong I am! Some of these days, my dear, when you take the town by storm, I shall go in for a regular training—as I should have done already if I had not married you."

IX.

NEVER had Em looked fairer, more daintily fragile and feminine, than she did one summer morning, lying back among her pillows, becomingly arrayed in a heliotrope dressing-jacket with lace frills, a soft spot of pink in either cheek. Beside her lay a very small bundle done up in an embroidered blanket, and a capable-looking woman, certificated and trained to the last point of efficiency, was bustling about the room, putting all in order for the visit of the new-made father.

A night of peril and pain, of horrible anxiety and dread for Roger, had been followed, in the dawn of an exquisite morning, by the comforting message that a daughter had been born to him, and Em was safe and doing well. He had wanted a boy, as most men do, but what of that? His face was full of thankfulness, if a little touched with awe, as he stole softly to the bed and bent over his wife.

She put up her face to be kissed. "There, there!" she said, as she gave his hand a little pat, "I am doing very well, but I am not to be agitated, so you ought not to look so—so exciting. Were you very nervous about me?"

"Horribly; but we won't talk of that now. You look blooming. Well, where's the young woman? Smothered in this parcel? Mayn't I look?"

Em turned back a scalloped corner of flannel, and

something very small and fluffy and red was dimly visible.

"I suppose you must," she said discontentedly. "But really I am ashamed of it. Did you ever behold such a wretched little specimen? Not only a girl, which is bad enough, but an ugly one."

Her tone jarred. He said nothing, but with his forefinger touched a downy cheek that felt like velvet.

"It's no good being vexed with me," she went on with a pout. "I couldn't help it. Of course I know you wanted a boy, and so did I; but after all, it isn't as if the creature were heir to anything, is it?"

"My darling, don't vex about it. I am only too thankful—" he broke off, afraid of saying too much if he let himself begin to express the relief and tenderness that surged up in him.

"Never mind, Ma'am, better luck next time," said the nurse, approaching the bed with something in a cup that she was stirring.

"Next time! Thank you! I am sure I hope to goodness there will never be a next time. It is too bad to be laid up and have to go through all I have for something one doesn't in the least want and never wished for. Oh, nurse, do take it away—nasty little thing! It is making the most awful faces; I am sure something is going to happen to it."

The nurse laughed in a superior manner. "Law, Ma'am, that's nothing; it is easy to see you are not used to children."

She whipped it off the bed and held it up, slapping its back in a knowing and scientific style. Now it was out of the blanket, it was apparent how tiny it was: the little white bedgown it was dressed in was small

enough for a doll, but the baby inside seemed to shake about like a little shrivelled kernel in too large a sheath.

"Here, give her to me a minute, nurse," said Roger; "I want to look at her. I have hardly seen her yet."

The nurse observed critically the strong delicate hands, used to the handling of instruments rarer if not more precious than babies, and decided that he might be trusted.

He carried the child to the window, and stood a minute or two with his back to the room, looking down at her—at the little red, puckered, ancient-looking face, the queer bald, shapeless head. Then she opened her eyes, purple-blue, as a new baby's always are, and he seemed to be gazing down into the heart of a mystery. He had always had a great tenderness for small, weak things: puppies and kittens appealed to him in their soft helplessness; but something far deeper woke in him when he felt the stirring of the little live body nestling into the hollow of his arm, and the wee fingers with their soft nails clawed feebly at his moustache as he stooped his face over her.

The father was very strong in Roger, as it often is where it might be least expected. His own childhood had known little cherishing; but after all, it is generally what has been lacking to ourselves that we are most lavish with to our children. Perhaps if Emmie had shown more tenderness, his would have been slower to wake. Most men are pleased with a little girl, by and by when the queerness of infancy has rounded out into the beauty and charm of child-

hood ; but few take much notice of the morsel of humanity at the very beginning of its earthly career. It seems to belong more exclusively to the mother in those early days. Probably if Em had been more motherly, Roger would have looked at his daughter, remarked what a queer little beggar she was, smiled and gone away ; but it seemed hard that the little new arrival, whose sex was certainly no fault of her own, should have to make her entry unwelcomed, into a loveless world ; so in the very first minute she conquered her place in her father's heart.

He came back presently, and laid the baby beside its mother. There was a moved look on his face as he stooped over Em to kiss her once more, with low murmured words of tenderness.

She looked at him a moment, then broke into a little laugh. "Why, Dodge," she cried, "how solemn you are ! Pray, have you been getting up this scene with correct accessories from 'The Heir of Redclyffe' or 'The Head of the Family' ? I am afraid I am not well up in classics for the young, but I am sure it must have been one or the other. What a pity I am so out of keeping. I spoil the effect."

He straightened himself with a short strong word that made the nurse turn round from the dressing-table, shocked.

"I think you had better go now, sir," she observed severely. "Mrs. Redway ought to be kept perfectly quiet."

He drew away, but Em put out her hand and detained him. "Oh, poor old boy !" she said with some compunction, "I didn't mean to be nasty to you. I expect you were horribly frightened about me last

night, and you are feeling rather upset ; but you know I never can stand heroics : they make me wicked ; and as to being thankful, why to me the whole business is simply an unspeakable nuisance. There, goodbye. Don't let that wretched Eliza give you bad dinners while I am up-stairs. You may come and see me again later on if you are good."

He went off then to give a lesson : for the day's work must be done though the world were new-created. Just at first he felt a little damped ; he was quite hurt that Em should display such studied indifference to this wonderful wee daughter of his and hers. Yet after all that was the very point : it was studied. He ought surely to know his Em well enough by this time to be aware that she had a rooted aversion to feeling, or at least to expressing, anything that was expected of her. A young mother and her first-born are the very commonplaces of sentiment, so no doubt she considered she owed it to herself to feign even a little aversion. He laughed at himself as he owned that Em, with all her absurdities and affected modernities, never failed to charm him, whatever she might say or do. For the moment he might be vexed, but the flood-tide of joy rose again, and he seemed to be walking on air as he breasted the steep hill to West Pinecliff.

His pupil there was a dull girl in the elementary stage. He listened impatiently for awhile to her slow painful fumblings, then took the violin from her to show her how a passage should be played. As his fingers curled round the strings, and he felt the throbbings of the wood against his chin, a sudden uncontrollable desire seized him for the outpouring of all

he felt and could not say. There was only one composer for him to-day: none of your latter-day complainers, with their problems, their discouragements, their despair—not those, but Mendelssohn in one of his moods of radiant felicity. With a curt "Do you know this?" he broke into the last movement of the E-minor Concerto. Relief, thankfulness, the pure *joie de vivre*, all sang themselves out in the flying runs. His eyes shone as he handed the instrument back to his astonished pupil.

"There," he said, "do you think you could do that?"

The young lady's mother turned round from the window where she was occupied with her netting, also a little surprised.

"Not quite yet, Mr. Redway, I should think; it seems a little beyond her."

He laughed, and turned the girl back to the elementary study which was her proper task.

Going down the hill, he overtook Ercolani, the Italian double-bass, sauntering languidly along in the shade, who remarked, "An oppressively hot morning," as he passed.

"Glorious, isn't it?" was the response.

Ercolani paused and wiped the damp from his pale face. "Why, Dodge," he remarked, "life seems to be smiling on you to-day; you look as if some one had left you a fortune."

"Do I? Better than that: I have a little daughter, born this morning."

"I congratulate you. The wife doing well, I hope?"

"Very well, thanks. But it is really absurd that I

should carry my triumph legibly in my face this fashion. I must try and tone down a bit. I feel a little mad."

The elder man smiled, but with sympathy, not mockery, in his eyes.

"Well, of course it is the most commonplace, every-day experience," went on Redway, looking a little foolish; "yet somehow this morning I feel as if the world was upside down."

"I know. The first time it seems a miracle. After all, you know the world is new for every one of us."

Roger laughed again, out of the joyousness of his heart. "Why, you seem to speak with experience. One would fancy you must have a nursery yourself, hidden away somewhere."

Ercolani paused for an instant, and a curious grave, far-away smile crossed his face. "Ah, my nursery," he said slowly. "Four little graves in Brompton cemetery—that is my nursery."

"Oh!" cried Redway, distressed, "I had no idea—I am so awfully sorry. I'd no notion you had ever been married."

"No, no, of course not; how should you? Don't distress yourself. You have only known me living here as a bachelor with my good sister Marta. It was all so long ago—but one does not forget. It was diphtheria; it was all over in a few weeks. And then their mother followed them: it broke her heart, poor girl."

"How awful!" said Roger, full of ruth, and with a new tenderness that yesterday he would hardly have comprehended. "I must seem a brute to have brought it all to your mind."

"Not at all. It does me good to speak of it sometimes. Marta, good soul, will never hear the slightest reference to my loss: she fancies it is bad for me to dwell upon it; but 'Kept close is not forgotten,' you know. But there, I ought not to overcloud your joy by a reminder of the tragedy that is in the world for some of us. Such an experience is very rare, thank God! There was a terrible epidemic that year. May you never know such a visitation!"

Redway walked on beside him for a few yards in silence, not liking to break hastily away, yet feeling as if his mere existence, in his pride and joy, must be an affront. And then the other spoke again:

"You must not fancy you have hurt me. It is good to see sunshine, though one must sit in the shade oneself. At any rate, my experience has taught me one thing," he added in a lighter tone: "how very uncomfortable the household is apt to be when the mistress is laid by. Come home with me and have some dinner. Marta will be pleased to welcome you and hear your news; the veriest old maids always delight to hear of a baby."

"Thanks; you are awfully good. Are you sure it won't bother the Signorina? I must just fly home first and see how my treasures are prospering."

"To be sure. I will go slowly on and tell my sister to expect you."

"That is a very wholesome-natured young fellow," he said to himself as he watched Redway speeding up the opposite hill. "I don't care for Madame much, I must say; but Englishwomen are queer creatures—very queer."

Certainly familiarity with the Signorina Marta would

hardly serve as a key to such a personality as Em's. Neither brother nor sister had any of the vivacity of the typical Italian; they did not belong to the sunny South, but had been bred up in an ancient North Italian city, between high walls and cold shadows, and had more of the slow calm Lombard temperament. The Signorina, convent-bred and conventional to a degree, looked upon the free-mannered bicycling young ladies of Pinecliff as a kind of hybrid race, neither men nor women, and she desired no acquaintance with them. She was angular, she was prim, with a code of deportment that matched the scanty black silk gown and transparent mittens with thumbs that she always wore. She was absolutely devoted to her brother, and if Redway roused and interested Giovanni, or Giannino, as she always called him, that was enough for her; she made him welcome, and her best recipes for stuffed tomatoes and maccaroni cheese were put in requisition on his behalf. She declined, however, to hear a word about the baby, and frowned down the slightest reference. She was afraid it would set Giannino thinking of his own little girls, fallen asleep in perpetual childhood so long ago.

X.

"Em, do you recollect an Italian-looking house with a brilliant garden, hidden away in the midst of the pinewoods by the sea? We peeped enviously through the palings like two children that first day I took you for a country walk."

"What, the enchanted palace? Why, of course I do."

Roger held a crested note in his hand. "Well, I am going to penetrate within the magic portal."

"What fun! Get me in too, won't you?"

"I wish I could. If it was a party I might."

"What is it? Lessons, I suppose; but I thought they had no children except that poor little idiot one sees driving about."

"Not lessons exactly, but something of the sort—a kind of thing I like much better than driving rudiments into children's heads. Sir Hervey Gilderdale plays the 'cello, more or less amateurishly, I expect; he has got a violin-playing cousin there, and wants to practise quartets, so he proposes to hire me as first fiddle. I am fond of chamber-music; I think I shall like it. Besides, it may lead to more: he hints at giving some musical 'at homes' later on, if the thing prospers. I wonder if they are good enough."

Em laughed. "You always have a healthy contempt for the mere amateur," she said. "Do try and induce Lady Gilderdale to have singing lessons, if you can. I should think you might work it."

"Oh, I fancy she is quite an invalid. I used to see Sir Hervey at the Palm-house when I was leading there, but I don't remember ever seeing her. He was a pale, limp sort of man, quite a musical enthusiast. I wish he may turn out a patron of the old style, and make me Master of the Musicians. They say he is rolling in money, and does not know what to do with it. He does not play, does not race, does not hunt, and though he has one of the finest moors in Scotland, does not shoot. He seems to do nothing but fiddle and write verses. He has a yacht, but he never races her—only cruises mildly about."

"Well, if you can direct a small stream of his superfluous wealth into our pockets, I wish you would. I want a new bicycle horribly, and if only I could afford a properly trained nurse for the brat, I should not be so tied. It takes all one's time to look after those cheap girls."

Shyness was by no means among Redway's weaknesses, yet when on the appointed afternoon he presented himself at Tristerwood, he began to know what the sensation meant. As he passed from the garish sunshine, from a confused vision of scarlet blossoms against a glittering sapphire sea, into the shaded dimness of a great paved hall with a frescoed ceiling, and followed the solemn footman down a long corridor between ranks of palms and statues, an unusual diffidence came over him. The man flung open an arched door, and sent his name echoing down what looked more like a private chapel than an ordinary room, and he had to follow it for some distance before he could make out who was there.

There was a dais at one end and upon it a small,

exquisitely carved and painted organ. All down one side were narrow lofty windows filled with stone tracery and with stone seats for two in each embrasure, like the windows of an old banqueting-hall. The Erard grand looked a mere plaything in the vast space. At the far end was a small group of dim, shadowy people, and Redway paused a minute in his advance, to try and make out which was Sir Hervey.

At the end where they were sitting, the windows were all shaded; but just where he stood, a broad shaft of western sun fell across the floor, and lighted up his square-set, tense figure and cropped black head. The languid group in the shadows stirred a little and looked towards him, then a tall, loose-jointed man with a pointed beard detached himself and emerged. He greeted the musician courteously, and led him down among the shadows, and they became distinct.

First a very tall woman, leaning back in a crimson lounging-chair, with hair as white as hoarfrost. Another, almost equally tall, was standing resting her shoulder against a black oak grotesque cabinet, and held a viola in her hand. This last had somewhat the air of a Botticelli angel, or perhaps one should rather say, of one of those imitation Botticellis which are painted by the pre-Raphaelites of to-day. Her cousin, Sir Hervey, had once remarked of her, "It used to be the fashion to compare women to flowers: Clemency puts me in mind of nothing so much as fool's parsley. There is a kind of sketchy, straggling grace about her; pretty yet ineffective."

Sir Hervey presented the violinist to Lady Gilderdale, to Miss Fane. In the background was a gentle-

faced woman in a gray nurse's dress, watching over a strange-looking box on wheels, something between a perambulator and a coffin, in which lay the contorted body and large, old-looking head of the poor little heir.

Tea and iced claret-cup stood on a table near, and Lady Gilderdale moved to it and asked what he would have. "You must have had a hot walk from Pinecliff," she observed.

"I did not walk; I bicycled," he replied with a whimsical notion that in this hushed, old-world atmosphere, the mere mention of a bicycle was an anachronism, if not a profanity.

"Bicycled! Oh," cried Miss Fane in horrified accents—she spoke with a slight lisp—"How could you risk a precious violin on a bicycle? Just supposing you had had a smash! And Pinecliff hills are so dangerous."

"My violin, I regret to say, is not so very precious. It is dear to me, I have played on it so long; but some day, I hope—" He stopped. With all the growing claims of Em and Betty, his hopes of saving enough to get a Strad. one day were becoming daily more remote.

Sir Hervey went to a cabinet with glass doors, and took therefrom a fiddle of curves as exquisite as those of a Venus, of a glowing amber tint that seemed to tell of centuries of music. He handled it with reverent tenderness.

"Some day you shall try this," he said. "It is an Amati. It ought to hold the soul of a musician, for it belonged to one of the finest players I have ever heard. He was a Hungarian gipsy, taken up and

educated by Count Czarda, who, as perhaps you know, was a great connoisseur. The man used to play in Buda-Pesth. He never came to London, alas! He was killed in a duel—a brilliant career cut short."

Redway handled the instrument respectfully enough to satisfy the owner, though he had never heard of either the gipsy player nor the Count. "Ah," he said, "it is a pleasure just to hold it in one's hands. Do you not play on it yourself?"

"Never. The 'cello is my instrument. Zamorski cured me of my ambition to be a violinist."

"How so?"

Redway had an odd abrupt way of asking a question, and the two ladies smiled at each other.

"By showing me what violin-playing could be if one lived for nothing else. With the violin it must be all or nothing: one cannot play a little. Since in my case it could not be all, it had to be nothing. To take part, not unworthily, in chamber-music, that is my highest ambition now. Well, shall we begin?"

Roger laid down the Amati reluctantly, and began to tune his own violin; and Lady Gilderdale, moving to the piano, struck the A. As she stood there, he, looking towards her, became conscious that his first impression of her had been all wrong. The silver hair, the chilly repose of her manner, had given him the idea of an oldish woman; now that he really looked at her, he saw that she was nothing of the sort—a few years older than himself perhaps. Her figure had the slender grace of a girl, and her complexion—well, the girls of to-day, with their faces healthily tanned by hockey, golf, bicycling, and what not, do not have such skins. Hers was of the kind that our grand-

fathers would have compared in rhymed couplets to wild-rose petals. Ben Jonson's lines, "Oh, so white, oh, so sweet, oh, so soft is she!" might have been written to Judith Gilderdale. But it was a hot-house complexion on which the rough winds of heaven had never blown, and Redway's inward comment as her slim hands presently struck the opening chords of the quartet with a soft uncertain touch, was that she was only half alive.

As the quartet proceeded on its intricate way, his critical faculty was gauging the quality of the performers and placing them all three. Sir Hervey was good, very good, quite above the amateur standard; Miss Fane a little wanting in tone perhaps, and occasionally slack in the uptake, but well trained and with perfect intonation. As to Lady Gilderdale, he shrugged his shoulders behind the backs of the players, and said to himself: "Hopelessly amateurish!" Yet, oddly enough, it was she, Roger felt, who was weighing him in the balance and finding him wanting, though he knew his playing was unimpeachable. His fingers itched for possession of that Amati, lying bedded in velvet in the Italian cabinet. Why did such things always go to those who could not use them? He felt that his bowing would have coaxed a mellow tone out of it that would have interpreted him differently. Yet was it altogether the fault of his old fiddle that his tone sounded thin and hard? Was it possible that he had been losing ground—that without knowing it he had been parting with some of that magic that used to be his? He listened to himself as he fancied Lady Gilderdale was listening, and he grew uneasy. Behind the veneer of self-confidence that was

always such a stay to him, lurked the true musician's sensitiveness to atmosphere. Your fiddler is like your conjuror: he can work no miracles without faith. What right had a woman who could not play a page up to time without faltering, to whom every hitch that occurred was invariably brought home—what right had she, pray, to sit in judgment and appraise him at a lower value than he set upon himself?

It was strange how he knew it, but he did know it, and it made him uneasily self-assertive. He pounced down inexorably where tact might have glided easily over a defective passage, seeing how nervous the pianist was. Nothing should pass on her side, he was resolved. The wild-rose tint on her cheek deepened to damask, and Sir Hervey grew impatient, but she went valiantly on. At the end, while the violinist was laying his instrument in its case, Sir Hervey remarked:

"I think it would be better if Mr. Redway would bring a professional accompanist next time; what say you, Judith? I was afraid it seemed rather too much for you."

Lady Gilderdale was still sitting before the piano, her hands lying lightly on the keys, touching here and there a soft chord.

"If you wish it, certainly; but next time I shall understand better what is required of me—I shall have practised."

Redway was smitten with compunction. He knew he had not been fair to her; that he had taken a kind of vindictive pleasure in bullying this stately-looking woman from whom he could wring no tribute.

"Rheinberger is by no means easy to read," he said. "If it does not trouble Lady Gilderdale too much,

and she would do me the favour to accompany us, I am sure another time it will all go more smoothly."

And therewith he bowed himself away.

"I don't think I like your fiddler much, Hervey," said Clemency Fane when he was gone, putting her chin down on her viola, and playing some runs. "Do you, Judith?—But I am sure you don't; he was quite rude to you. He is awfully vain, you could see."

"Not vain—conceited perhaps."

"My dear Hervey, what do you mean? A distinction without a difference."

"Not at all. Vanity implies a mistaken estimate—nothing behind the pretension; conceit, a good notion of what is really there."

"How fond you are of paradoxes! You think him a good player, then?"

"An admirable player—sound and thorough, absolutely competent. Knowles was a fool to quarrel with him. Still, many kings do not care for too good a prime minister."

"Well, I freely own that it does not appeal to me, though of course I acknowledge its goodness; the way he grasped those big chords was really masterly. Now, Judith, confess you did not like him, for I know you did not."

Judith smiled a little: she did not choose to run him down because he had given her a rough time.

"I think I did partly; his playing is wholesome and strong, though it has its limitations. It put me in mind of a sentence in Lanier's 'Poet's Musical Impressions'—Ah, here it is." She was turning over the leaves of a magazine in search of an article that had pleased her. "Listen, Hervey: 'While he has taste

enough to like the best music, yet there is a certain something—a flame, a sentiment, a spark kindled by the stroke of a soul against sorrow, as of steel against flint—which he hath not, and the want of which will for ever keep him from penetrating into the deepest of music.' For ever—I don't know about that, though."

"I sometimes wonder, Judith," said her husband, "whether the things you say are insight or fancy. I thought him simply a first-rate professional—no more."

"Professional, oh yes; and he thought us trifling amateurs."

"Professional," caught up Clemency, "yes, and that ought to mean—"

"Ah," interrupted Sir Hervey, "professionals are of two sorts: those who live by Music, and those who live for her."

"Dealers in a certain commodity, or priests of a certain mystery," added his wife.

"And our friend belongs decidedly to the former category," cried Clemency. "His music is to be bought for money; he makes a merchandise of his finest feelings—if he has any. You know I always have a wild impracticable idea that music ought never to be a marketable commodity."

"And how, pray, in that case are poor fiddlers to live?" laughed Lady Gilderdale.

"Oh, there ought to be an endowment, or a patron, or some such arrangement."

"Which would come to much the same thing in the end. In your socialist state, my dear Clemency, when you establish it, perhaps you will be able to arrange it so, but in this imperfect world I think I

would sooner dispense with the poor amateur than with the professional."

"Ah," said Sir Hervey, "what would I not give to have been obliged to fiddle for my bread when I was a youngster! That brings out the grit that is in a man. With all my opportunities of hearing the best, with all my leisure, and all my love for it, a fellow like that can put me to shame."

Clemency sat down in the window-seat, and took up a piece of tapestry she was at work upon. "You undervalue yourself, Hervey," she said. "He may be admirable and excellent, and everything of that sort, and he certainly tramples us under his feet; but for poetry and passion and insight into the magic of Schumann and Raff, I believe you and I, contemptible amateurs as we are, are far ahead."

Meanwhile Em was cross-examining her husband about his experiences.

"Well, what is the enchanted castle like when you are inside?" she asked.

"Like an Italian palazzo and a college chapel, and everything that is most unlike Pinecliff."

"And the people?"

"Rather mediæval and unreal. I thought when I arrived they looked like a small party of family ghosts, sitting among the shadows. And their voices are so low, they make you feel as if you were in church."

"And how do they play?"

"Sir Hervey and Miss Fane remarkably well; her Ladyship not up to much. Somehow I fancy they will tire of it soon, and it will all fade away."

"Meantime," said Em, "I have got a fresh engagement too—a much more satisfactory one than yours

promises to be. Fancy! Mrs. Temple-Smith wants singing lessons, and came to me."

"Mrs. Temple-Smith? Why, who is she?"

"Don't you know, you ignorant boy? That comes of never reading anything. Mrs. Temple-Smith is a personage."

"Well, I am not much the wiser. What sort of personage?"

"She is a novelist—the novelist of the day. Her books are revolutionising society. Surely you must have heard of her 'Queen or Slave' that every one was talking about."

"Do you mean she wrote that? Disgusting rot, I call it."

"She is the most cultivated woman!" cried Em with some indignation; "one of those wonderful people who can do anything. She painted for some years at Julien's studio in Paris; then she took up sculpture; now she has a craze for music, and by great good luck some one mentioned me to her. She has just been to call and settle about terms. She is a splendid woman—so beautifully dressed! Sometimes those clever, writing people don't care how they look, but she has quite a style of her own; she is like a picture."

"H'm!" said Roger unsympathetically. "A widow, I suppose?"

"No, I don't think so; I imagine she is separated from her husband. I believe she went through the most awful experiences, and that is what made her take up her present line."

"I must say I don't admire her present line, and I

would rather you did not have more to do with her than you can help. Do you see ?"

Em laid down her work and looked up at him sharply.

"Do you mean to say you expect to dictate to me who I am to make friends with, as though I were a girl in the schoolroom ? I take the liberty of thinking that I am at least as good a judge as you."

"You are a lot cleverer than I am, I admit, and read more ; all the same, there are things that a man knows better than a woman, and this is one of them."

Em took up her work again, and spoke playfully, almost mockingly.

"My dear, you are quite behind the times. This sort of thing is quite gone out, I assure you. I don't interfere with your engagements, and I expect you not to interfere with mine."

"Well, I suppose if you have promised to give her lessons, you cannot very well get out of it ; but I wish you had not had the introduction. Don't get more intimate with her than you can help."

"How can you be so narrow-minded ? I feel very much for her. She has been subjected to the most odious and unjust persecution for her views. If she does write things that Mr. Podsnap would not put into the hands of 'the young person,' she does it from the loftiest motives."

"Then I wish her lofty motives would keep themselves to themselves."

Em was just leaving the room, but turned back to say over her shoulder : "By the way, do you know she is a cousin of your wonderful ghosts at Tristerwood ?"

XI.

CERTAINLY Betty was a very tiresome little girl. At an age when other babies spend their time discreetly in sleeping and growing fat, she was cantering about on unsteady legs, pitching on her nose on the slightest provocation, clawing at everything within reach, and investigating every foreign substance with her ever-inquisitive tongue; chattering too, with amazing fluency, in a language no mortal could understand. In crawling, toddling, clambering, and, it must be added, in mischief, she was as forward as a monkey, but as to filling out and growing plump and round, as a well-conducted infant should, she never gave herself time to do anything of the sort. From five o'clock in the morning till she was tucked into her crib at night she gave neither mother nor nurse any peace.

Her father was well pleased with her antics; that she should be so small, made them all the funnier; he used to call her his "pocket Venus," and quoted in her defence all the old saws about "best goods in smallest parcels," and "Small herbs have grace: Ill weeds grow apace"; but she certainly was a weird little atom, and Em regarded her with much disapproval.

One morning it chanced, as it usually does at the most inconvenient moments, that the nurse had demanded—in these days one can hardly say requested—a holiday, so Em found herself unwillingly placed

in command. She was obliged to put off a lesson or two, but promised herself to occupy her morning in practising for a concert which her new pupil, Mrs. Temple-Smith, was getting up, and thought she might do a good deal in the intervals of dancing attendance on Miss Betty, though the latter's requirements seemed to be endless. The mysteries of the nursery-toilet having at length been got through, Em plumped her daughter down on the hearth-rug in the drawing-room, with her favourite toys about her, and, opening the piano, began the soprano solo which she was to take in the Cantata.

For a few minutes all went well : Betty liked music, and danced her dolly up and down to it ; but presently it occurred to her that she should like to bear a part herself, so she toddled rapidly forward, clutching at the keyboard to save herself from falling, with most inharmonious effect, just as her mother was accomplishing a bravura passage of some difficulty.

Betty, having been well slapped and shaken, was carried back to the hearth-rug and seated there with an emphasis intended to convey to her small mind that she was expected to take root. She never cried long, so Em returned to her studies and soon got into the swing of her part again, but only to find herself pulled up by fresh excursions and alarums. She was of an inventive turn, however, and by the time the baby had pulled all the legs and arms off her dolly, thrust the broken neck of her headless gee-gee through the lower panels of the Japanese screen, dragged a bowl of flowers over on the top of her, and had a narrow escape with the ink, she had hit upon a plan for securing a little peace. It was a very fine

morning : Betty would be far better in the garden, and with one end of a long sash-ribbon secured to her waist, and the other made fast to a mountain-ash which grew in the hedge dividing their small garden-plot from their neighbours, she could hardly get into much mischief. Such flowers as she could reach she was welcome to, and as to the dirt—well, both Betty and her pinafore would wash later on.

So Em sang away to her heart's content. When she had finished the Cantata, there was a batch of new songs which Roger had brought her the other day, and which she had never found time to try over. She completely forgot the baby, and her high clear voice effectually drowned the wailings that by and by arose from the garden—in her own ears, that is : Miss Meabury, sitting at needlework in her bow window next door, heard shrieks and tried to peep through the hedge to discover whether the sounds proceeded from the garden or the open windows of the house. Presently she called Miss Alicia.

"Sister," she said, "something must be the matter with that child. They really ought not to let it scream like that."

"It is a very naughty ill-tempered brat," said Miss Lishy. "That is nothing but temper, I'm sure—" as a hoarse screech almost drowned her voice. "If it was my child—"

"I am sure something is wrong ; it sounds as if it were out of doors. It can't have fallen out of window, can it? I shall run up-stairs and try and see into their garden."

Up-stairs she went, and by craning her neck far out, could just perceive a blue ribbon tied round the

trunk of the mountain-ash, the other end of which appeared to be fastened to a bundle of clothes that dangled half-way down the small area in front of the kitchen window. Presently she distinguished the convulsive kicking of a wee pair of blue shoes amongst the white petticoats. Clearly the bundle was neither more nor less than the baby upside down. She flew to the rescue.

"I must go in and pick her up!" she cried to the detaining Alicia.

"Caroline, pray remember that Mrs. Redway has not called."

"Alicia, I am not going to call on Mrs. Redway; I am simply going to rescue that unfortunate infant, if not too late."

While she spoke, she was thrusting her feet into the goloshes without which she never stirred abroad.

Betty, it appeared, had been furnished with a soft ball as the toy least likely to inflict damage upon her, and had been tied, her mother imagined, at a safe distance from the area; but the ball, with the usual perversity of inanimate things, had taken the first opportunity to roll over into the abyss, whither baby of course pursued it. The sash gave to a certain extent, but pulled her up short just as she toppled over the edge; so there she hung suspended, a yard or so out of reach of her desired treasure. If she had been a heavier child, the ribbon would probably have given way, with disastrous results; but it was in a strong knot, and the baby was as light as a feather, so she dangled in comparative safety, kicking and screaming lustily.

At the moment that Miss Meabury arrived on the

scene, followed by Miss Lishy, who, though protesting, thought she might as well assist, a bicycle whirled up to the gate, and Redway himself was off it and up the garden in two bounds, in time to see his daughter, very red in the face, in Miss Meabury's arms, trying to scratch Miss Alicia, who was struggling with the refractory knot of ribbon.

"What has happened?" he cried, snatching Betty, and finding to his surprise that he was pulling up the mountain-ash by the roots. "Is the child hurt? How on earth came she to be tied into this tree?"

"We must apologise for this intrusion," began Miss Meabury in her formal voice. "We should never have thought of venturing into the garden, but the poor little dear cried so loud, we were convinced some accident must have occurred."

"Accident! She could not have got tied in this knot by accident. It is some wanton, cruel mischief. I can't imagine who could have done anything so spiteful to a little child."

He had whipped out a knife and slashed through the ribbon ruthlessly.

"Dear, dear!" cried Miss Lishy, "what a pity! Such a lovely silk ribbon. What will Mrs. Redway say? I am sure I could have disentangled it with a little patience."

"Patience!" said Roger between his teeth, "I don't think it is a case for patience. The child might have screamed herself into a fit. Where on earth can her mother have been, not to hear her?"

He was too much excited to notice the sounds of singing, but the sisters exchanged a glance.

"I don't think Mrs. Redway is far off," observed

Miss Alicia, as the high, clear notes of "Pur Dicesti" floated out from the open window.

"It must have been one of those abominable girls," he went on. "The child's nurse is away, and the other servant must have tied the little thing up to keep her out of the way. She shan't stay another hour in the house : it is absolutely brutal."

"In a few minutes more the dear child would have been killed," remarked Miss Meabury solemnly. "She was hanging right over the aperture when we found her, only suspended by a ribbon. If the knot had not been most securely attached, I tremble to think what the result might have been."

"Nothing less could have justified our interference," protested Miss Alicia. "Our proper course would no doubt have been to ring the bell and send a message in to Mrs. Redway, but we could not leave the infant a moment longer in such a position."

"Now, Betty, say 'Ta' to these kind ladies who came and helped you," he said. But Betty, unmindful of past perils, was now clamouring to get down and make another attempt on the pit whence she had escaped, in pursuit of her beloved ball. She was like her mother in wanting whatever happened to be out of reach, and Roger had to jump down and get it for her before she would be pacified.

"Won't you come in, and let Mrs. Redway thank you for your kindness?" he said as he clambered up again and resumed possession of Betty. "We are most awfully obliged to you for coming to the rescue."

"Pray don't mention it. Most happy, I am sure, to have been of service. No, I thank you, we will not

come in ; we could not think of intruding on Mrs. Redway at this early hour."

"No doubt she is much engaged," remarked Miss Lishy, "otherwise she must have heard the poor child screaming."

"Good-morning," they both added in chorus. "We trust the dear baby will be none the worse for her little adventure."

"Caroline," said the younger sister impressively, as they proceeded up the garden path to their own front door, "not having witnessed the occurrence with my own eyes, I would not mention my suspicions to Mr. Redway ; but it is my firm conviction that Mrs. Redway tied up that unfortunate child herself."

Meanwhile Roger had dashed up-stairs and burst into the drawing-room like a hurricane.

"Do stop that infernal singing!" he cried, "and attend to this poor child. If it had not been for those good ladies next door, she would have been killed."

"Good gracious!" cried Em, springing up. "What mischief has she been in now? Here, give her to me. I never knew such a brat! You can't take your eye off her for a second. I wish I had not let Ellen have a holiday ; but I suppose if I had refused, she would have given warning."

She was examining Betty's injuries, which were slight : a tiny drop of blood on her cheek from a scratch, a little bruise, and a grazed hand were about the extent of them.

"Well, there does not seem much damage done after all. What has she been doing? Tumbled down on the gravel, I suppose ; but I thought I had given her too short a line."

Roger's eyes blazed. "You gave her !—you ? Do you mean to say you had the brutality to tie a baby like that up to a tree as if she were a dog ?"

Em was astounded. That Roger, in whose eyes everything she did was perfection, who had nothing but fond playful rebukes for all her whims, should suddenly turn upon her and speak in that tone, was so astonishing that for the moment it took her breath away.

"I don't know what you mean by using such a word to me," she cried. "I could not be worried with the child all the morning ; I had my work to attend to."

"Your work !" he broke in. "Your work is to look after your baby."

"If you think I am going to turn myself into a domestic drudge, you are very much mistaken," said Em angrily, still too much astonished at finding herself taken to task, to be able to recover her usual easy philosophy. "The child was perfectly safe ; she has a genius for getting into mischief."

"Safe ! She had fallen into the area, and it was a mercy she had not broken her neck. If the Miss Meaburys had not heard her, and run in, I don't know what would have happened."

"Interfering old cats ! I believe they made it all up. I am certain she could not have got to the area from where I tied her."

"She did ; she was hanging right over, when I came : they were just hauling her up. You will have to call now, and thank them."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I never asked them to come here meddling."

"I don't wonder you are ashamed to confess that it was you who tied her there. You may well be. How you could avoid hearing her scream I can't conceive."

"Oh, I heard her, but I want to break her of that way she has got into of yelling whenever she is left alone. She must be taught to wait till she can be attended to."

Roger had taken the baby again, and was walking up and down the room with her, hushing her against his breast. Though not much hurt, she had been frightened and shaken, and was conscious, as babies and dogs in their ignorance often are, of an atmosphere of anger and discomfort; so she had continued to fret, but gradually, as she cuddled down against his shoulder, her little wailing noises quieted, and she began to suck her thumb.

"A baby not much more than a year old!" he said as he looked down at her, "and such a little mite. How could you?"

Emmie looked across the room at him, and a curious feeling to which she had hitherto been a stranger, suddenly contracted her heart. What had become of Roger's devotion, which she had taken so entirely for granted, and found so boring? Was it all lavished now on this tiresome scrap of a baby, whom she had never desired, who did her no credit, and gave her an infinite deal of trouble?

"It is all very well for you," she said, "who come in from out of doors, to make all this fuss with the baby; but if you had the bother of her all day long, you would soon tell a different story."

XII.

Mrs. Temple-Smith did not number punctuality among her virtues. She was a woman who lay late in bed, and then contrived to get through an amount of business that would have amazed one of your methodical early risers ; but then her multifarious engagements, social and otherwise, were continually treading on each other's heels and mutually devouring one another. This way of life wastes other people's time considerably, and her singing-mistress often had to spend an hour or so of hers, waiting for her. Strange to say, Em did not resent it ; for the novelist was the idol of the hour. She liked being on terms of personal acquaintance with a writer of distinction, whose name was in all men's mouths, though the lady's celebrity was due less to her intellectual capabilities than to the daring with which she handled questions which the collective wisdom of our fathers considered either settled or beyond the range of discussion. Her audacity fascinated little Mrs. Redway, for whom the new was always the delightful, and who considered that the honour of being put to inconvenience by the author of "Queen or Slave" abundantly compensated for a wasted afternoon.

So, finding herself alone at Mrs. Temple-Smith's rooms one day, she took possession of a rocking-chair, and contemplated her surroundings with an idea that she might utilise the opportunity by doing an

"interview" for Bertha's paper, and wondering if she would get a guinea for it. Would she be found out, and get into a scrape? That was another question. She thought not; Mrs. Temple-Smith was not a woman who shunned publicity. Anyhow she might as well note details; they might come in useful.

"'Refined and luxurious surroundings'—that is what they always say," she mused. "H'm! Luxurious perhaps, and practical; no drapings, awfully few ornaments, not many pictures. What a queer thing in the corner: a Hollyer photo of a Watts, I suppose." She rose and went nearer to examine it. "And this rainbow-splash must be a French impressionist bit. What is it? a waterfall? Why, I declare it is a woman—a dancing girl! I wonder if those clay models are her own; they must be, I should think, for they are none of them finished. What should one say of them, I wonder? 'Instinct with life; freaks of genius, untrammelled by conventional rules,' would about meet the case, I should think." She went on a little further. "No silver-table; no Jappy things; at least—yes, that is certainly a Japanese arrangement of flowers in a brass bowl. I wish I had not so many knick-knacks in my room. I shall make a clean sweep."

"A regular man's knee-hole study-table," she went on, "and oh, what a pile of papers! and the rubbish-basket overflowing on to the floor. The chairs, too, are rather mannish; they are not particularly comfy unless you get right in and tuck your feet up"—for Em was small. "They would suit long-legged people."

Her investigations had brought her by this time to

the corner of the mantelpiece which bore the distinctive note of the new woman in the shape of a box of cigarettes. She had just taken these in her hand and was examining them with an inquisitive little nose, when the sound of the door-handle turning caused her to set them down hastily, and drop into a chair with an innocent air of being absorbed in the *Daily Mail*, which she picked up.

It was not, however, the mistress of the abode who entered, but another visitor, a young man whom Mrs. Redway knew very well by sight, and was not at all averse to making acquaintance with. Valentine Garcia was beginning to be talked about; he was a pianist of brilliance and ability, a composer of many songs, and a forthcoming opera of his was being mentioned in the circles of those who know everything. He had bad health—otherwise Pinecliff would hardly have been favoured with so much of his society, and he looked languid and nerveless. He had been accused of an addiction to Hinde's curlers, and he looked capable of it; not only the *crêpé* appearance of his long thick hair, but the whole effeminate get-up, the tinted lips, the touched-in eyebrows, hinted at the practise of arts excusable in a woman who desired to hide the ravages of time—monstrous in a lad of three-and-twenty.

He bowed, and sank gracefully into one of the deep chairs, in a lounging attitude.

"Portia is late," he remarked presently in a rather high and plaintive voice. One of his little affectations was always to talk of women by their Christian names. "Portia always is late; but I observe people are apt

to think more of you if you keep them waiting. I suppose that is her principle."

Mrs. Redway laughed. "That's true," she said. "All the same I was just making up my mind to wait no longer. I think I must give it up and go home."

"Oh, don't—just as I have come. That would be very unkind. Don't you think I might be able to entertain you for another half-hour? Besides I suppose you have come to tea, and it gives one a horrid sensation to go away with an unfulfilled tea."

"No, I have come to sing with Mrs. Temple-Smith. I generally do stay to tea afterwards."

"Ah, now I know! I felt certain I had seen you before. I had the pleasure of hearing you sing at that charity affair in the spring, when I played my little Tarentelle. I know your husband. Need I introduce myself?"

"Quite unnecessary," said Em politely. "I think all musical Pinecliff knows Mr. Garcia."

"Thank you. How pretty of you! Meanwhile shall we solace ourselves?" He came round and took the cigarette-case from the mantelpiece and handed it to her. Em did not care much for smoking, but she knew how to play at it without making herself sick: so she took one, and displayed a marvellously pretty hand and wrist as she lighted it. She laughed within herself as she wondered what her usual style of decorous pupils would think if they saw her. Mrs. Temple-Smith, she knew, rather preferred her friends to take liberties than otherwise; she need not fear her being offended if she came in.

In a few minutes she arrived. "Ah, there you both are—consoling each other for my absence!" she

cried, as she kissed Em. She was very effusive with other women—at least if she liked them ; if she did not, she never scrupled to let them know it.

Without being handsome, she was rather an effective woman : pale, with large light prominent eyes, and loosely arranged, fluffy hair ; very restless, forever moving head or hands.

"Val," she said, "I suppose you have introduced yourselves and discovered that this is my little nightingale. After tea she shall sing to you if you are good. I have been so driven all day, dear," she added to Em, "that I really am not fit for a lesson ; you shall sing to us instead, if you don't mind."

"Would you like me to pour out the tea for you ?" said Emmie, as the tea-things and the little spirit-kettle made their appearance.

"Do, dear ; I like my friends to make themselves useful, as Val knows. He always arranges my flowers for me."

"Ah, it needs a drone to arrange flowers. You busy women who have your professions and your careers, and what not, have less and less time for it, and it needs more and more. We no longer cut a handful of roses and thrust them into a glass. Would you believe it took me an hour and ten minutes this morning to arrange that white iris and branch of weigelia ?"

"They are perfectly lovely!" cried Em with enthusiasm. "I was wondering how in the world they were coaxed to stand up like that."

"Ah, that is a trade secret. I took lessons last autumn. There is a man in a tiny little shop just off Bond Street who gives regular lessons; he took them

himself in Yokohama. There were a series of articles in the *Studio* a year or two back, professing to describe how it is done, but that is not enough; you require to study the touch."

"I wonder you can find time for it; for I am sure you cannot call yourself a drone, Mr. Garcia, playing as you do."

"Oh, that is nothing. I assure you it costs me infinitely more thought and toil to keep Portia's vases decent. Would you believe it, when I first knew her, she had a tumbler of dead sweet-peas—positively dead—upon her writing-table!"

"Now, Val, make yourself useful and hand the muffins, and don't talk nonsense. I am bent on letting you hear Mrs. Redway sing, for I want you to compose something expressly for her. You know I am getting up a concert for the inauguration of the Pinecliff branch of my Pioneers, and her singing is to be the great feature. We are to have a cantata first, in which I shall take the contralto solo and she the soprano, and then I shall have a miscellaneous programme for the second part. Do write me something original."

Garcia stirred his tea slowly and looked doubtful. "I can't write to order," he said. "I am a poor creature—a mere instrument. I don't write my songs; they write me."

"Well, I promise one will 'write you' when you hear Rose Alba sing, if you give it the chance."

Em was on her mettle. To be held up as an inspiration by one celebrity to another, and that other the composer of "Wood-notes Wild," went to her head with a species of intoxication, and she sang with an

entrain that she rarely knew. This was Art; this was living; this was something very different from the little narrow life in the little semi-detached villa to which Roger's obstinacy in not letting her go on the stage condemned her. She sighed for emancipation. Perhaps these two new acquaintances could help her to what she craved. Her clear flute-like notes rose and thrilled in those runs and *fiorituri* that she could never get Roger to appreciate.

When she ceased, her auditor clapped his hands gently. "You really ought to sing in operetta, Mrs. Redway," he remarked. "That is your *genre*."

Em blushed and dimpled with pleasure. "That is just what I always long to do," she said; "but there are difficulties. You see I should have to live in town, and then I suppose it would not be easy to get an engagement unless one was in the swim."

"But I suppose your husband is in touch with all the musical world?"

"Oh, my husband!" said Em with a little *moue;* "he thinks my business is to stay at home and mind the baby."

Mrs. Temple-Smith's eyes flashed a sympathetic look into Em's. "Oh, you must not give in to that," she said. "Val is the person to help you to an engagement; he knows all the impresarios and directors in town. When I make my début I shall certainly look to him. Val, you really ought to write an operetta expressly to suit Mrs. Redway, and I will find the libretto. What say you?"

"What my old nurse used to say when I wanted her to make sails for my boat—'when I have nothing else to do and can't sleep.' My dear Portia, I am

simply overwhelmed with work. There is my Concerto promised for October, and only half done, and my Opera cries aloud to be gone on with, and I am too lazy to touch it. I might throw off a song or two some time perhaps. Mrs. Redway, I have one bit of advice for you—

"Gather ye roses while ye may;
Old Time will still be flying.

You see I preach what I don't practise; but voices are like tides, and must be taken at the flood if they are to lead on to fortune."

Em leaned back in her chair and an ugly look came over her fair face.

"Ah," she said, "if I could have my way! But Mr. Redway is so unenterprising; he says he has made his connection and got his footing here, and he will not throw it up and try town, though I tell him if I once got an engagement I should very likely make double what he does."

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs. Temple-Smith, "there you see the instinctive jealousy of men coming out. Except the idle and worthless ones, they can none of them bear that their wives should earn more than they do. No doubt they are afraid if we should, they would no longer be able to keep their feet upon our necks."

"Now, Portia, if you are going to trample on the despised sex, I shall depart and leave you and Mrs. Redway to have it all your own way," said Garcia rising. "But you know," he added, turning to Em, "sorry as I am to disturb your rose-coloured picture, not even I, who am credited with occult powers behind

the scenes, could get you an engagement to sing a leading part in town straight away. You would have to serve your apprenticeship with small parts in a touring company, and work your way up; it is the only way to begin."

"Then I never shall begin, for my husband would not hear of my travelling about without him."

"There again!" said Mrs. Temple-Smith. "As I always tell all you young people, husbands are a mistake; but you are all so headstrong. There is my secretary, a really valuable little woman, a treasure to me till she thought fit to throw herself away; she would not listen to reason."

Garcia groaned. "There you go, Portia! Charles the First's head again. Ta ta; I'm off."

Mrs. Temple-Smith followed him into the passage.

"Just tell me what you think of her, Val, before you go."

"Oh, a very pretty little voice, very flexible and wonderfully well trained; but no soul, no soul!" And he sighed himself away.

She re-entered the room. "Don't go yet," she said, seeing Emmie was beginning to put her gloves on. She sat down beside her on an ottoman and looked at her fixedly for a minute or two with her large light eyes. Then she said slowly:

"My dear child, you are not happy; I can see it."

The resentment Em had been nursing ever since the unlucky result of her experiment in baby-minding surged up, and forced something very like a sob into her throat, though she was by no means a tearfully inclined woman. She swallowed it down, and looked at her friend half fascinated. Something in Portia

Temple-Smith's gaze seemed to compel her to regard herself in the light she regarded her.

"Happy? No. How can one be happy, when one feels all one's powers wasted and rusting? When one is being turned into a mere domestic machine?"

"Ah," said Portia, drawing a long breath, "I always felt somehow that you were one of us, and that was why I was so drawn to you from the first."

"You know," said Em looking up into her face, "your books were a revelation to me. I could never, never tell you how much I owe you."

The elder woman bent forward and impulsively kissed her.

"Just now," pursued Em, "what you were saying about girls being so foolish to marry in such a hurry went so home to me. Why, why are we such idiots?"

"Ah, why indeed? Because no one warns us, and we dread the sneer of a foolish world at 'old maids.'—But there are no old maids nowadays."

"I suppose, like so many silly girls, I wanted the credit of getting married before my sisters. Because I was the prettiest I thought I ought to go off first, as people say. Ah, what nonsense it all is! And there are they all three working for themselves, and leading such jolly free lives—no cares, no children, no bothers."

"What right," cried Portia in her tragic tones, "have our families to drive us into the marriage-market like slaves to the dealers?"

"Oh, I wasn't driven by my own family," said Em candidly; "if I had been, most likely I should not have done it in such a hurry. I never would do what

I was bid, all my life. I was quite independent, but Roger was so overwhelmingly in earnest and whirled me on so, I had no time to realise my own feelings. And just then I had got into rather a tight place with my singing, and fancied I wanted some one to help me, and so you see—"

"And now you realise what you have done. Poor child!"

"The life altogether is so different from what I had fancied. I thought marrying a musician would have helped, not hindered me; but he doesn't think anything of my music—he is so taken up with his own. When we were engaged, he made such a fuss with me, I thought I should always have my own way, and now he won't do a single thing I want."

"Now he shows himself in his true colours. Is he cruel to you, dear?"

"No, oh no; he means to be very kind; but he is so domineering, so hectoring. He expects me to spend all my time in the nursery, fiddling over Betty and her clothes, or else he wants me to do things for him. He never seems to realise that I have a life of my own or any interests but his."

"Ah, my love, yours is but the common lot. But for that very reason"—as she saw Em's face fall—"for that very reason I take the deeper interest in you. Dear child, what would I not give to emancipate you! But it will come some day; it will come some day."

Em looked puzzled and a little startled, and Mrs. Temple-Smith went on:

"Some day we shall have shaken ourselves free from the trammels of an outworn convention. Men and women will be free to enter into and break off at will

such alliances as seem good to them. Even the selfishness of men will be cured, for they will have learnt their lesson; they will no longer be able to treat us as chattels."

The neophyte looked a little doubtful, and her prophetess shook her head at her. "Ah, Mrs. Redway," she said, "open-minded as you are, advanced on many points, I can see that you have been bred up in the Philistinism of the British public: the gods of the Philistines are still your gods, and you are frightened to see me cast them down from their high places."

Em could not stand that reproach. "No, no, I honour you!" she cried; "only I don't see quite—I mean while the laws are what they are, there seems nothing to be done."

"Most true. But what alters bad laws? Public opinion. And what creates public opinion? The courageous action of the few. If those who are higher-souled than their sisters will but have the courage of their convictions, and refuse to hold themselves bound by vows taken in ignorance, public opinion will presently come round to their side, and applaud them instead of hounding them down."

Em went home with her mind seething in a tumult of new ideas. The beauty of revolt, the duty of cultivating one's own individuality at any cost, are the idols of the market-place to-day. She fancied it was an original cult she was adopting, nor knew she was shouting with the crowd just as much as those who sing in the chorus of conventionality; only it was a somewhat newer cry.

That singing lesson was a fair sample of the course

she gave Mrs. Temple-Smith. Sometimes they sang, sometimes not; very often the whole hour passed in discussion. Occasionally Valentine Garcia assisted, and now and then he brought a new song of his own composition for her to try. He thought but little of her musical capacity, but appreciated her charm, though it affected him less strongly than the commanding personality of Portia Temple-Smith. The relation between him and that lady rather puzzled Em: there was little or nothing of flirtation about it; it was too stationary and of too long standing for anything of that kind. He seemed to be an exception to Portia's usual sweeping condemnation of mankind—perhaps because he was so effeminate.

Mrs. Redway made herself very useful to the idol, and even mastered typewriting on a Remington, that she might be able to perform—unpaid—some of the duties of the recusant secretary, who had, in Mrs. Temple-Smith's phrase, put her hand to the plough and looked back. She copied an infinite number of articles upon burning topics, which were expected to overturn the laws of the country, if not those of Nature, and she gloried in the task.

Redway never interfered. In fact he knew nothing about it. Since his wife was bent on employing herself, he let her, though he would far rather have worked for her. To do Em justice, her house was always properly looked after, and Betty too, now her nurse-maid had come back; and he was getting too busy with more lessons on his hands than he knew what to do with, to have time to miss his wife's company as he would have done a year ago.

XIII.

"HERVEY, come here and look at the exact likeness of your fiddler."

Lady Gilderdale was standing at the open window of the dining-room, throwing crumbs on to the terrace for the birds. Sir Hervey did not need to ask Where? or Which? as he came and stood beside her, smiling at the blackbird that had taken up his position on the balustrade, and was pouring forth the lavish beauty of his song with a certain joyous satisfaction in achievement, expressed in every feather of his glossy plumage and in the sparkle of his eye, which was fixed upon his auditors, not timidly but as though asking applause.

"He carries his beak very much as Mr. Redway does his nose," she remarked.

"I think you are a little hard upon my blackbird, you and Clemency both; a little inclined to set your amateurish sentiment against his trained knowledge and capacity. If he is conceited, I submit he has a good right to be. Besides, in his profession it is a valuable quality and helps him to force himself on."

"Yes, I know. Yet in some directions it may keep him back. I don't think he has quite realised that there are heights he has not climbed to, depths he has not plumbed."

"That will come. There is life-blood in him. He does me good; the vigour of him braces me like a

fresh wind. There is nothing wishy-washy about him."

Clemency was still dawdling over her breakfast. "Wishy-washy, no: but I think one might have a little more poetry without sacrificing strength. Besides he snubs me, which I don't like. Why didn't you try and get Paul Fechter?"

"My dear girl, Paul Fechter would not have come. I daresay he would have said he would, for he is good-nature itself, but nine times out of ten when we wanted him he would have forgotten all about us; and when we did get him he would not have patiently ground us through our parts. There is a considerable dash of the amateur in Paul."

"Of the genius, you mean—erratic, not to be counted on nor pinned down to the ordinary engagements of every-day life; but when you do get him—" She ended with an expressive pause.

"Ah!" said Judith, turning round from the window, "when you see him standing up before you with his snow-white hair and his cherubic face, and that divine Strad. tucked under his chin, you feel that you are going to be taken up to heaven straight."

"And when will Redway take you there?" put in Miss Fane.

"That is not fair," said Sir Hervey. "I grant you his playing may not have the seraphic qualities that set our Paul among the angels, but it is intensely human, virile, vital."

"To my mind it wants feeling."

"Well, that depends on what you mean. Sentiment, the facile expression that utters itself in die-away softenings, may be lacking, but I find in him a

range of sensations that goes much further; not love and longing merely, but the joy of existence, the pride of life, a hundred things that your sentimentalists never give you—all expressed with a breadth of conception that comes from nothing but a fundamental grip of his art and its capabilities. He may still have much to learn, but the strongest souls have most."

"Oh, Hervey," cried Miss Fane, "you hear your own fancies when he plays."

"Can one hear anything that is not there?" mused Judith. She was still standing by the window watching her birds. "Though if one is soul-deaf one may miss what is. Sometimes I fail to find the expression I look for, and then am astonished at the revelation of something I had not known was in the music till he put it there. I think there is a good deal more in him than comes out. Have you noticed, he always looks brimming over with things to say, but he never says them? I wonder if he is as silent in private life as he is with us."

"He certainly knows how to hold his tongue," remarked Sir Hervey; "and as my sage mother used to say: 'If you can hold your tongue you can hold anything.' I was immensely amused the other day, Clemency, when you were trying to pump him about the Palm-house and why he left; what a wall of adamant he turned against your battery. He will never give himself away."

"I believe Clemency was rather affronted," laughed Lady Gilderdale. "He certainly was curt."

"Well," said Miss Fane, "I do think when one was good enough to show a little interest in him, the least he could do was to respond gratefully."

"I fancy you may have been on delicate ground. Wasn't there a rumour that Mr. Knowles wanted to marry Rose Alba, who is now Mrs. Redway?"

"Ah, that reminds me," said Sir Hervey, "I was asking him about engaging a singer if we should give a music-party in the autumn, and he mentioned that his wife was open to engagements. I wonder if she is good."

"Oh, don't you remember?" said Clemency, "we heard her a year or two ago at the Palm-house. A very pretty little woman; you compared her to a Greuze. Portia Temple-Smith was speaking of her the other day. She is having singing lessons of her and raves about her style."

"Portia's ravings would not go for much with me, but I do remember: a very light voice, but a charming style. Let us have her by all means."

As may be gathered, the practices at Tristerwood had been going on steadily through the summer. Though Roger Redway had not quite gained the suffrages of the three amateurs, his vigorous personality was telling on them all. Miss Fane, who was accustomed to unbounded admiration for powers certainly above the average, resented his outspoken criticisms and his brusque manner, but Sir Hervey appreciated the compliment of being measured by professional standards, even if it involved a strain to keep up to them. On his languid chilly temperament Roger's vitality acted like a tonic. Music had always been to him the chief solace of a narrowed, semi-invalid existence; under the new influence it was growing to a passion. It was almost the only thing he cared much for; shy and proud, a martyr to asthma

and disappointed in his dearest ambition, he went hardly at all into society. During the long years of his wife's illness they had quite given up entertaining house-parties. A near relation to stay, an occasional musical "at home" to neighbours and acquaintances, was the extent of the hospitalities of Tristerwood. It was no wonder that an air of remoteness from ordinary interests, of aloofness from the every-day world, hung about them.

For nearly twelve years Lady Gilderdale had been laid aside from all active participation in life. A terrible carriage accident had cost the health and reason of her only child, and the tragedy of it had eaten deep into her own life. She had come to the bitter knowledge that Sir Hervey's one desire and hope in marrying had been to have an heir. Sole representative of a very old house, his family had been his fetich, and she had learned, though how she could scarcely tell, that it had been her perfect health, her beauty, her long descent, that had made her in his eyes an ideal mother for his heir, not she herself that he had desired. As so often happens in such a case, three or four years elapsed before the longed-for event impended, and then came the accident that left him with an invalid wife and hopes frustrated. The child was an idiot and frightfully deformed.

Every one said how beautifully he behaved. Never one word of reproach did he utter, though both he and Judith knew that it had been her wilfulness in spite of his warning, that had led to the disaster. But oh, how passionately did she long for him to speak—to say anything rather than keep his heart closed to her! In those first impatient years she cried on Death

to come and release her—release him, as she felt he must long to be released. He was very good to her, and so was his mother, to whom all his heart belonged. It was the mother who had planned and brought about the marriage; it was she indeed whom Judith had been in love with when she accepted the son. The younger woman had had a girl's enthusiasm for the clever brilliant Lady Gilderdale, who made all her son's sayings and doings sparkle with a charm she lent them. In truth Judith knew Hervey chiefly through his mother's talk; she felt that so good a son must needs be a good husband; she thought the cold shy nature would unlock when marriage should have put the key into her hand. But it never did; he remained all his mother's. They were all in all to each other. To them both, Judith was at first the possible mother of the heir; later, when she had failed in her mission, a stricken soul to be tenderly dealt with and kept from all the disagreeables of life.

It was the custom in the family to extol Hervey's beautiful devotion to his invalid wife, and resignation under his disappointment; but Clemency Fane once remarked: "Fond as I am of Hervey, I could never have married him; he would have given me an inward chill."

At last, after nearly twelve years of sofa life, some new discovery in surgery, some specially gifted doctor, were brought to bear upon Lady Gilderdale's case, and after some months of treatment, chiefly abroad, she found herself upon her feet again, to begin a new existence if she could. She had lain down upon that sofa a girl of five-and-twenty, with all her outdoor interests and social ambitions suddenly quenched, pas-

sionately rebellious against the fate that chained her there; she rose from it a white-haired woman, a woman who had read and thought, who had done little else but read and think, for twelve long years. It was very much as if she had died and suffered a reincarnation.

The death of old Lady Gilderdale had taken place a short while before her daughter-in-law's recovery, and sincerely as Judith mourned her, a hope arose in her heart that now at last there might be room for her at her husband's side ; that she might in some measure fill that post of ministry to him which his mother's devotion and her own ill health had kept her out of all these years. She resolved to make herself his companion ; she interested herself in all that interested him ; she took up her long-neglected music that she might be able to play his accompaniments. He accepted her society, admired her grace and the charm of her conversation, he consulted her, deferred to her wishes, yet let her feel that for him the empty place would always be empty ; that though he was happy to have her with him, solitude was sweeter still.

It vexed Judith that her playing should fail to satisfy his fastidious taste. It was not that he criticised it ; he only never asked for it. She had always loved music, but her study of it in her girlhood had been amateurish, and even before her illness he had manifestly held it cheap. As long as his mother lived he needed no one else to play for him, and Judith had kept her playing in the background. Naturally all the years of enforced idleness had put her at a great disadvantage as regarded technique, though in some

subtler qualities of comprehension and feeling her powers had been ripening in the shade.

It was then that Redway had walked into the still life of Tristerwood, and Judith resolved to put herself under his tuition, and, cost what toil it might, win back at least such measure of proficiency as should enable her to bear her part in the chamber-music in which her husband delighted. She found in him the very master she needed. The rigid exactingness he had learned in helping to train an orchestra of men, his utter want of consideration for the helplessness of the amateur or the dignity of "my lady," the curious mingling of brusqueness and patience that characterise the professional teacher, the reliableness of his own playing and utter indifference to hers, put her on her mettle and subdued her nervousness far better than praise would have done. He amused her by the frankness of his criticisms; she who, so to speak, had been kept in cotton-wool, found a certain piquant novelty in being scolded.

She studied with him regularly, besides taking part in the general practices, and presently she had her reward. Sir Hervey made no remark, but he asked her to play as a favour, and brought her all his new things to try over with him. She gained more: something widened in her own life; the world seemed bigger, brighter, fuller of interest than it had ever done before. The more she played, the more delight she took in listening. She found music, as many find it, the best, nay the only, substitute for personal happiness.

Meanwhile the three whom Redway was influencing so strongly in varying ways, were not without influence on him. Out of the rough calyx of the music-

master the musician was coming into flower. Sir Hervey was the one most appreciative of the ripening that was taking place in his favourite, and it won from him the precious gift of the Amati. Redway's position was very much that of the *Haus-Musiker* in courtly German households of the olden time : he came and went as they needed him, and grew into a certain kind of intimacy—a partial kind, for it only took cognisance of him as a musician ; that he was a real live man as well, they hardly took into account.

Clemency Fane was rather fond of experimenting upon the violinist and trying to draw him out on the subject of his art—usually in vain, for when the practices were in progress he had a way of lifting his violin to his shoulder as a significant hint that the time for conversation was at an end. But one day he had joined the two ladies at tea upon the terrace, for Sir Hervey had been detained at a meeting in Pinecliff.

Miss Fane was in a state of ecstatic delight over a new symphony that had lately been performed.

"It was exquisite," she said. "I seemed to myself to be walking through a dense wood ; I pictured it all to myself; the birds sang, the stream bubbled over the pebbles, it was springtime. Then a dark cloud came up ; there was the sound of thunder, the tramp of armed men ; a battle broke in upon the calm. Now, do tell me, were those the things it made you think of ?"

He shook his head.

"Oh, but do try and remember and tell me. I do so like to know how different people listen. You must have been thinking of something."

"No, I was not—not of things, at any rate."

"I suppose you mean you were thinking of clefs and progressions and development of subjects, and so forth."

"No, I don't think I was; not consciously."

"Do you mean you were not attending?"

Lady Gilderdale looked up; she had been listening with an amused smile on her face. "My dear Clemency, when you read a poem are you thinking of the rhyme, the rhythm, the construction all the time?"

"No, but then I am thinking of what it says."

"But you see the poem puts its images in words which appeal to thoughts: the music speaks musically."

Redway met the eye of the speaker and smiled. "Thank you," he said; "that is exactly what I mean, only I did not know how to say it. To me it is just music; the rest is all cant, to my mind."

"Religion often seems cant to the uninitiated," said Miss Fane, with a hint of offence in her tone.

"I am afraid that was an uncivil word to use after what you had just been saying; but I was thinking more of those intolerable programmes, dictating what you are to be imagining all the time, as if the music itself was not enough."

"I am with you there," said Lady Gilderdale. "Take such a thing as German's symphonic poem of 'Hamlet,' for instance. I always feel that I should enjoy it so much better if I were let alone. I dislike being told that I am to think of Ophelia's insanity at one moment, and of the stabbing of Polonius at another. The whole thing might work in me the

same mood as the tragedy itself, but directly you begin to translate it in detail, you have spoilt it."

"After all," he said, "it is just an attempt to bring music down to the level of the average hearer."

Judith nodded. "To render it into a language understanded of the people."

"Exactly. And isn't it a fact that of all Beethoven's symphonies, the Pastorale is the one least beloved of musicians and most popular with the laity?"

"Oh, the Pastorale!" cried Clemency; "I give you that. I grant that the attempt to literally imitate natural sounds is the lowest thing music can do, and with the great master it was probably a mere jest. But surely we may like to know what inspired the composer—what he was thinking of when he wrote."

"I don't know that I would admit even that," said Lady Gilderdale. "It is the state of feeling that he gives, and the more you put it in words, the less the music will say to you. What was a sunrise to him, may be a lark's song to me; but if I know the language, and can catch the same mood of joyous exhilaration, I don't see the necessity for translating it back into a material sunrise."

"I suppose that is the emotional way of listening," said Miss Fane. "I think Krehbiel classifies the effect of music under three heads: the sensuous, the intellectual, the emotional. I wonder which of the last two is the higher."

"Please don't," said Redway rising, and setting down his cup. "You are getting me horribly out of my depth again. Lady Gilderdale, do you think it is any use my waiting for Sir Hervey? I could come again on Thursday at the same time if that would do."

"Sit down again and have another cup of tea. Don't let Miss Fane frighten you away. She is terribly fond of theorising, but doing things is more important than being able to talk about them. I for one decline to subscribe to your classification, Clemency; the three are far too closely intertwined —there is an appeal to each in all music worthy the name."

He sat down again and took the cup Lady Gilderdale offered, but did not attempt any further contribution to the discussion, and in a minute Clemency's quick-moving thought had reached another phase.

"If poetry is a criticism of life," she said after a brief pause, "I am sure music is so in a still higher degree."

"Perhaps so," said Judith, "if by a criticism you mean an interpretation."

"Then the best musicians ought to be those who have lived and experienced and suffered the most."

"That is by no means the rule, Miss Fane. I have known fellows who played divinely, and in a heart-breaking sort of way too, who when the fiddle was out of their hands were just jovial good comrades —no more; and, conversely, people with the finest feelings are no good if they have not mastered their craft."

"I suppose so. Still I cannot help thinking that those who have suffered must have the truest insight into music."

"Maybe," said Lady Gilderdale, "that is just what genius means: to have by gift of nature a grasp of the meaning of all life—of its depths and of its high

places, which others must go through the fire to learn."

Roger said nothing ; his quick, bright eyes went from one to the other of the speakers. Then suddenly he said he must really go ; he would be late for his next appointment.

Miss Fane leaned back in her chair and watched his retreating figure.

"Why are gifts so divided ?" she said. "So great a faculty—for I acknowledge that—and so little comprehension."

"I am not sure of that. He does not express himself in words, that is all."

For Judith was remembering a thing she had noticed in him when, as sometimes happened, she took her lesson up-stairs in her little morning-room. Tristerwood, raised on its terraces above the encircling pinewoods, looked away over the eastern headland to the white lighthouse standing with its sentinel rocks far out to sea ; to the long chain of sand-hills ; to the river broadening on its way through the marshes ; to the belt of ragged pines straggling singly down to the crumbling ferry-cottage and the old inn, and beyond to the dwindling, melting coast-line lost in an amethyst haze. On a still day at the turn of the tide each tree, each building, the masts of every vessel lying in the harbour, would be repeated in long lines of gray on a silver mirror ; another time the long links of golden sand-hills seemed floating in a sapphire sea ; or again, a line of surf rolled up against the bar, gleaming white beyond the dark trees.

Never two days alike, and in all its aspects Judith loved it, and to her the outlook from her window was

a glimpse out of the every-day world into the land which lies the other side of the ivory gates. When she observed that it drew the violinist like a magnet, and he never played so well as when his eye was travelling away down the shining reaches, she thought perhaps after all he had more sensibility than they had given him credit for, and the soul of an artist lay behind those silent lips.

XIV.

BREAKFAST was just over, and Em was playing with the baby. Betty's company, though hardly desired at this early hour, was indispensable, since the domestic arrangements of the little household obliged her nurse to be otherwise occupied. Roger was taking a hasty glance through the paper as he swallowed his last cup of coffee before he set off on a round of lessons. Presently a startled exclamation from him made his wife pause in her rather risky amusement of dangling her watch into the baby's mouth, and ask:

"What is it? Are we going to war with the Transvaal, or have the socialists blown up the royal family?"

"No, no; it is my father. Listen:

"'Lovers of music of an elder type will learn with regret that the last of the votaries of a fast-vanishing school is about to close his long career. Doctor Sebastian Redway, who has been organist of Dronechester Cathedral for upwards of forty years, has been stricken down with paralysis, and is not expected to live many days. In the musical world of to-day his name has become well-nigh a dead letter, for he was of those who refuse to move with the times, and it is long since it figured on any concert programme; but those who appreciate scholarly contrapuntal writing will spare a sigh to the memory of the composer of "Abner" and "The Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm."

A very new man is pointed to as his probable successor.'"

He threw down the paper, and sprang up. "Get me a time-table; I must go down to Dronechester."

Em set Betty on the floor and went to fetch one.

"Look here," she said, coming back; "there is a train at eight-forty, but you could hardly catch that; besides, what about your lessons? Still I suppose you had better go. One can never tell how people may act at the end, and he must have saved."

"Oh, Em, how can you! I wasn't thinking of that."

"Weren't you? Then you ought to have been, for my sake and Betty's. Neither you nor I earn so much that we can afford to sneeze at a little private income if it should come our way. Go and play the prodigal son by all means, my dear, and do it prettily."

His face darkened. "I am not in the mood for joking," he said.

"Isn't this rather a pose? Is there any need for affectations between you and me? Most women, I know, are supposed to like decent conventions, but candidly, I prefer plain speaking."

He looked at her with a curious look. He recognised the absolute futility of asserting that the instinctive, instantaneous movement of his thought had been regret, compunction—that in honest truth the money-question had never entered his head till she put it there.

"Don't reckon on any money from that quarter," he said. "My father is one of those who do not change their minds."

"Then why waste time in going? You will lose

pounds if you should be detained a few days; besides, pupils are always offended if you put them off. You have not seen your father for twelve years; you cannot really care about seeing him again."

His answer was to take the time-table from her hand and pull out his watch.

"I think I could just do it," he said. "Toss a few things into a bag for me, there's a good girl. And you'll have to write and put off my pupils. My engagement-book is on my dressing-table. I will wire if I find I can get back to-morrow."

He had always reckoned Dronechester one of the places that do not change. In his impatient boyhood he had scoffed at it as an old stick-in-the-mud, but now the wide new station with its glass roof, its asphalt paving, and its staring advertisements did not strike him as an improvement, and was so altered that had he not seen the long bulk of the cathedral from the carriage windows, he would hardly have believed that this was indeed Dronechester. There used to be a footpath to the town, with a field on one side, but now there were rows upon rows of horrible little artisan dwellings, all exactly alike, reaching to the streets. Something seemed to have happened to the leisurely calm of the High Street; the low shallow bow windows behind which the goods used to appear with a decent reserve, suggestive of something better stored away inside, had given place to plate-glass frontages with a display that might rival Pinecliff, everything ticketed at something and eleven pence three farthings. The ancient exquisitely wrought Butter Cross looked astray and out of countenance, and the pump with

which he had played so many tricks in days of yore, was exchanged for a scarlet letter-box.

The lime avenue that formed a fitting prelude to the great nave of the cathedral interlaced its long green arms as of old, and threw the self-same dappled shadows on the flags; but the ancient graveyard with its crowd of quaint tombstones of every date and style, whereby the old townsmen, dead and gone, tried to speak to their fellows and successors, as they passed them by, Sunday after Sunday, had all been ruthlessly destroyed, the very dead themselves turned out of their once-sacred resting-place, that the ground might be levelled, and God's Acre turned into a pleasure-garden.

"Poor old father, who hated change so! What must he have felt! And he thought to lie here," said Roger to himself. Then he passed through a narrow archway underneath a buttress, called the slype, and stood in a green quiet close.

Ah, here at last he found his boyhood again; here nothing was changed! The same expanse of emerald turf, fenced round with rusty chains, the same dignified serene-looking Georgian houses with their high, narrow windows and stone facings; the same rooks cawing sleepily in the lime-trees, the same jackdaws chattering among the gargoyles—nay, the same tufts of snapdragon and valerian on the old gray walls, the same tender draping of toadflax and harebell over the arches of the bit of ruined cloister adjoining the Deanery.

But that passionate, eager-hearted boy, who had once so hated it all, where was he? How was it he had never come back? Had he indeed never had time to

grow homesick for this "haunt of ancient peace"? He remembered how, when he had got away, it had seemed like an escape from prison: it touched his senses with other feelings now.

His father's house was at the end of a secluded row called Dumb Alley. Here truly time had stood still and waited for him. The very scent of the twin honeysuckle from the porch of the Canon's house opposite smelt of home, as he stood upon the doorstep.

He stepped back and looked up at the house front, and the shuttered windows told him he was too late. He waited some time after he had knocked; then at last a shuffling step sounded crossing the flagged hall, and the door was opened a very little way by a young servant-girl.

"Doctor Redway is—" Somehow he could not finish.

"He is dead, sir. He died this morning early." She was about to close the door. It appeared to her there was no use in leaving cards on a dead man, and there were no relatives to be inquired for. What else could the strange gentleman want?

"Stay a moment. Does Mrs. Webster live here still?"

"To be sure she does, sir; but I don't think you can see her; she was up with the master all last night, and she've just gone to lay down."

"Very well. I will come in again later."

"I don't know, I'm sure," said the girl doubtfully. "Perhaps I'd better tell her, if you'll step inside, please, sir."

She went off without inquiring his name, and he waited, crossing the hall to the glass door at the back,

and looking out at the sunny garden, at the trees he used to climb, at the corner under the wall where nothing would ever grow, where he had had his very own garden when he was a little chap.

Webster, a hard-favoured person of sixty-five, was considerably astonished when she walked demurely into the hall to interview, as she supposed, the undertaker's young man, to find herself taken by the shoulders and heartily kissed by a moustached gentleman she wasn't sure she had ever seen before.

"My dear old Webbie, don't you know me?"

"If it isn't Master Dodge! Oh, my dear, my dear, to think you should have come too late!"

Down came the tears, and the good soul buried her face in her apron.

He patted her shoulder. "There, don't cry, dear. Come and sit down and tell me about it." He drew her to the broad window-seat, and sat down beside her. "I wish you could have let me know sooner that he was ill."

"My dear child, how could I? And me never knowing where to write to—nor rightly knowing indeed whether you'd care to hear."

"I know. It was my own fault; I ought to have let you know where I was. I suppose he never told you. I wrote to him, you know, when I first went to Pinecliff, and again when I was married, but he never took any notice of my letters. Then last year, when my little girl was born, I had a notion I would come and try to see him; and then I thought perhaps he would fancy I came for what I could get. So somehow I never plucked up courage, and this morning I saw his illness in the paper."

"You don't mean you have got a wife and child, Master Dodge? Well, I never! How the time do go, to be sure. You didn't bring 'em, I suppose?"

He smiled. "No, they are at home at Pinecliff. I should like to show you the baby, Webbie; she is an awfully 'cute little beggar; she can say a lot of things. I wish father had known. I wish—ah well, it is too late now."

"'Twouldn't have been no use, my dear, if you was to have come. You know what your poor dear papa was—a very firm gentleman always."

"I know. Still— Did he never speak of me, Webbie?"

Webster did not answer immediately, but sat crimping up the hem of her apron in her fingers. "Well, there, I don't half like to tell ye," she said at last.

"Go on; I would rather hear."

"Well, on the Tuesday the poor master seemed a deal worse, clearer in his head but more quiet-like, and he was always so erritable that I didn't half like the looks of him; no more didn't Doctor Dillson. 'My good woman,' he says to me, 'your master is not long for this world,' he says. 'His son had ought to be sent for.'

"'Law, sir,' says I, 'Mr. Roger ain't been home this twelve year. The Doctor himself may know where he is, but I know no more where to write to than the babe unborn, and I dursn't for my life put the question to him.'

"'I always think,' says he, 'that when there is no hope, the relatives should decide whether the patient should be told of his condition or not; but in this case I'll take it on myself. Doctor Redway is a man

of courage, and 'twon't make no difference either way now. I'll speak to him when I come again, the last thing.'

"So in the evening, when he had felt his pulse and so forth, he says, 'Doctor,' he says, 'I can't give you no hopes of getting about again. You are losing ground, and I think it right to speak out candid and open in case of your having affairs to settle, and such-like.'

"'All right,' says the Doctor; 'you don't frighten me any. I knew it just so well as you can tell me.'

"'Is there anything you would wish to attend to?' says Doctor Dillson, 'while your faculties are all clear, you know?'

"'No, I thank you,' says Master. 'My affairs is all settled. I didn't wait till I was seventy to see to all that.'

"'I think, sir, your son should be written to,' says Doctor Dillson, rather timid-like.

"'Son, sir? I have no son.' And with that poor Master turned his face to the wall and we didn't dare speak another word, neither of us."

She paused a moment, then went on: "It was early this morning he was took. I was sitting by him. 'Webster,' he says sudden, and put out his hand, and that was all."

When she ended her narrative Roger sat still, gnawing his moustache and saying nothing. The good woman sniffed audibly a few times, and her apron went up to her eyes again. "Ah, dear," she mourned to herself, "'tis a pitiful tale to tell to a son, to be sure; and him to listen with neither a word nor a tear. But there! They was hard men, both of them. Maybe

'twould have been different if his poor dear mamma had lived."

Roger moved presently, and Webster stood up. "You'd like to look upon him once more, Mr. Roger?"

He assented silently, and followed her up the wide shallow stairs with the oaken balusters down which he had so often defiantly slid. He could see the very scratch he had made, riding down one day with a nail in his hand, and vividly recalled the castigation he had got. Webster opened the door of the big front bedroom where his father had always slept, and closed it behind him, leaving him alone.

The room smelt close and heavy and was almost dark, for the shutters were to, though not fastened, and only a narrow beam of light crept in and lay slantwise across the faded Brussels carpet with the familiar pattern in dim red. He knew the position of each bit of furniture so well, he easily found his way across, and setting one shutter partly back, threw up the window to let the sweet summer air blow in. He could breathe better, but his heart was beating very hard and thick as he stepped to the bed and reverently folded back the sheet that lay over the rigid form.

"How unaltered!" was his first thought. A little grayer, a little more rugged perhaps, and with the characteristic grimness emphasised by a three days' growth of stubble on the unshorn chin. The ineffable smile that gives such a strange aloofness to most dead faces was absent; the dead man looked arrested, with the expression of one who had met death, as he had met life, under protest.

His son knelt down beside him, and said aloud:

"Father, I would have been a good son to you if you would have let me." Then he pressed his lips to the cold forehead. Ah, how cold is that coldness of death! He expected it, yet it startled him, and he shivered all over. For a few minutes he remained kneeling. He was not a Catholic, yet to pray for the soul of his dead father seemed the instinctive outcome of natural piety.

Then he rose and went to the window, and stood awhile musing and wondering who had been to blame for the long estrangement. He believed still he had been right. If the decision were to make again, he would not reverse it. Every man must take the responsibility of his own life upon his own shoulders when he comes to man's estate. No father has a right to impose his will upon his son and force him into an uncongenial career. But with the wider outlook of thirty, Roger saw both sides more clearly, and acknowledged that his crude youth had done angrily, rebelliously, that which might have been done with greater respect and consideration. Youth in its ignorance is often very cruel to age. He knew better now what fatherhood meant, and he understood how it might have been perverted love that made the old man so harsh and stubborn, so bitter even unto death.

Then some one tapped on the door and said the Dean had called, and would like to speak to him.

XV.

Next morning Redway wrote to his wife and told her not to expect him back for a few days : he should remain at Dronechester till after the funeral. Em thought it very foolish ; he ought to come back to his work, and run down again for the day, she said. The journey was nothing, and since his father was already dead when he got there, she could not see what was to be gained by his wasting his time.

In truth, the spirit of the old place had laid its hand upon Roger, and woke a desire for its stillness and peace. He did not want to turn his back upon it at once, and be swallowed up again in the strenuous hurry of his usual life. He would fain have a little quiet lonely holiday here, in company with his old self, roaming about the dim old cathedral whose stones were built into his very life.

The town might be changed past recognition—might have gone rushing down the hill of modern progress, the goal of which is cheap vulgarity, but nothing could change the cathedral. There it stood in its stately solemnity, as it had stood for more than eight centuries, a witness for high ideals and noble workmanship, a witness for the Kingdom of God against the kingdoms of this world.

His old school had been ruthlessly "improved." There was a new head master since his time, and the big, noisy schoolroom where he had worked and

shirked had been divided into classrooms. A better plan no doubt—but the corner where his desk had stood was unrecognisable, and he could not even find the window-ledge where his own initials were cut deep. Some of the more out-of-the-way streets were unaltered: St. Clement's Lane, a staid narrow passage with the old houses nearly meeting overhead, where the offices of Messrs. Hiscock & Payne were situated, was just the same. He had to call on them about his father's will, and wondered to himself how he would ever have borne to sit day after day, like a caged linnet, behind those dusty wire blinds.

Then there were the long green water-meadows below the town, where the river, parting into innumerable branches, meandered through the valley. As he strolled down there in the summer dusk, his feet brushing through the cool lush grass, and heard the aspens whisper to each other the same old secrets as of old, it almost seemed as though London and Pinecliff—nay, Em and the baby—were all a dream. The shallow trenches were lined with blue forget-me-not, the sedges and tall spikes of purple lustrife stood knee-deep in the stream, the swallows were dipping and darting after the water-spiders just as they used to do, and there was a sedge-warbler fluting like an imitation nightingale there where the rushes grew thick. Between him and the town stood long ranks of Lombardy poplars like sentinels, and through them the immense gray pile of the cathedral loomed dim in the purpling haze.

There was hardly more change on the gray chalk downs that rose in softly rounded slopes against the sky, only they began farther out, as the suburbs had

encroached. There they lay, fold beyond fold, in their sheep-dotted monotony, the hills so like each other that he had often lost himself there in fog or snow. Spring always used to begin first out there, where the hazel coppices nestled in sheltered cup-like hollows, with a bravery of golden tassels, while the first white violets of March peeped out underfoot. There, too, was music always, winter and summer, for over those uplands the lark scarcely ceased to sing.

On his last evening he went late into the cathedral, for he had his father's key, and he liked it best when the feet of the tourist had ceased to prowl and his incessant questions no longer surrounded each monument with clamour. As he stood outside the choir, over against an ancient and very lovely chantry, a strangely vivid memory came to him, and he could almost fancy he could recognise the very boss of carving against which his eight-year-old head had leaned while the eight-year-old heart had swelled with a passion of impotent childish rebellion against injustice. It was Christmas Day, and some Christmas treat on which the little heart had been set had been denied him. There was no one to take his part, no mother to beg him off. He had stolen in late to hear the anthem, and crept up through the dense crowd in the nave to this obscure solitary corner. As the prayers inside droned on, he was thinking of his baby trouble and the cruelty of it all. He had been naughty, he knew, but not as naughty as all that, and it was a shame.

Then there was a rustle as the people all rose from their knees, and a hush, and then it seemed as if a hand clutched his heart, and he held his breath as out

upon the silence stole the wondrous chords. He could see the dark hills and the folded sheep, and presently rang out the clear, sweet voice—"There were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." The voice ceased, and there came the rustling of wings as the angels gathered together, and the multitude of the Heavenly Host joined in the song—"Glory to God."

For a moment the child had the Beatific Vision. He stood beside the shepherds on the bleak hillside, seeing the glory of great light and hearing the message of Redemption. He saw the infinite greatness that was around and above him, the infinite littleness of himself and the thing he wanted. The vision would not stay, yet he would never wholly forget. The man, as he moved away out of the shadow, found his eyes were wet.

After the funeral, his father's will was read, and he was of course present, though after what Webster had told him he knew quite well that it could not concern him. The savings did not amount to much; the old doctor had never been a man to look after his money; what there was, with the exception of one or two legacies to favourite pupils who had done the old master credit, was left to his faithful servant, Martha Webster. Roger was well pleased that it should be so, and consoled her when she expressed her distress at "robbing him," as she put it, by asking her to give him one or two things that had belonged to his mother—her workbox with its old-fashioned fittings and faded silks, a valueless trinket or two, and a few books. He thought he would like to give Em something that had been hers. He was genuinely glad

that Webster should be comfortably provided for in her old age. He had proposed to his wife to ask her to come and live with them as Betty's nurse, but Em negatived the suggestion very decidedly. Old servants were a nuisance, she said, and so tyrannical : she would be certain to spoil the baby and resent interference ; it would not do at all. She was probably wise ; Webster had never been used to a mistress over her, and the chances were, it would have been a failure. So he bade good-bye to the old servant and the old home that he would most likely never see again, but part of the old self he took with him.

Emmie was out when he arrived ; the maid thought she had gone round to Mrs. Temple-Smith's to tea. He had written a card to tell her what train he was coming by, and he did think she might have remembered. He had nothing to do, so as soon as he had had something to eat he went up to the nursery and played with the baby.

A curious passage in that remarkable book, "The Choir Invisible," suggests that in every man lies hid something of the woman, the wife he looks to find in the woman he loves. The ideal woman who lurked in the depths of Roger's consciousness, and to whose measure he was always trying to fit Em, would have been at home to greet him ; would have comforted him without staying to question why he should need comfort after a loss which could be no loss ; would have understood better than he did himself the trouble of feelings, old and new, that had been stirred up, the craving for something that had never been, the bitter regret—not for what he had done, but for the way he

had done it; the passionate pity that ached for the poor old man who had died as he had lived, alone.

He was in a soft mood; he had been touched and moved as he very rarely was. Through all these years of striving and toil he had been hardening, but now the crust that so often grows over a man as middle age draws on had for the moment been broken through; he would fain have rested his head against his wife's shoulder and let her comfort him. But he knew better than to make any such demand on Em; she could pet him very sweetly when she chose, but she seldom answered to any appeal. She would certainly scoff at any pretence of grief for the father he had neglected for all these years.

However, as soon as she heard that he was in the house, she came straight up-stairs and entered the nursery, looking exquisitely pretty in a pink frilled muslin blouse.

"Well, did you save anything?" she asked, as she kissed him hastily through a spotted veil.

"No," he said shortly and rather gruffly. "I did not expect to, as you know. My father had very little to leave, and what there was went quite properly to the old servant who looked after him."

Em shrugged her shoulders. "Of course. I thought as much. And no doubt she had feathered her own nest pretty well already."

"I don't grudge it to her if she had, faithful old soul! Do you know she had lived with my father for forty years? Think what it would be at sixty-five to be turned out to begin the world again. I am glad he did the square thing by her at any rate."

"Well, it can't be helped now. Only it was a pity

you wasted five days down there. I could not see the use of your staying, since he was dead already when you got there."

He broke out angrily: "Em, I wish you would understand that had nothing to do with it. I did not go down for what I could get."

"Oh, very well, since you say so. But supposing it was filial duty, what was the good when the poor old gentleman was no more? I hope you have not been amusing yourself with any old flame, eh?—There, don't use naughty words. You have come back most horribly cross, do you know? Well, I don't wonder, poor old boy! it was odiously disappointing."

She kissed him again, this time without the veil.

"Come along. I am going to take my hat off, and you can come with me and tell me your adventures. It is quite time Betty was put to bed."

He decided he would not show Em his mother's things; she would only think them old and shabby. He put them carefully away: Betty should have them by and by.

. . . . . .

"I had no idea, had you, Judith," remarked Sir Hervey Gilderdale, "that our fiddler was the son of old Sebastian Redway of Dronechester? I wonder I never thought to ask him; it is not a common name."

"I don't think I would say anything about it if I were you," she answered. "I fancy he must have quarrelled with his father. I think I remember hearing that Doctor Redway had had trouble with a son."

"Wild oats, I suspect. He seems a steady enough fellow now. I suppose he has an eye to the main chance, for I met Canon Westbury in the train, and

he told me that though the young man had not been near his father for a dozen years or more, he appeared at the funeral. There was nothing for him, however; what little the old man had to leave went to old servants."

"I think if there had not been something amiss he would have spoken of his father," said Judith. "He was a man of some eminence, wasn't he?"

"He was one of the finest organists I ever heard. I remember his playing at one of the great festivals years ago. I wonder he did not bring his son up to the organ. He was an excellent composer, too—one of the very last of the old school. Fine traditions die with him."

XVI.

"So I suppose you expect me to congratulate you?" Em kissed her sister and began to help her unfasten her long travelling-cloak. They were standing in Em's bedroom, scrutinising one another after the manner of sisters who have not met for long. Ethel had just arrived to spend a few hours; a brief farewell visit: for next week she was to sail for India to marry an old pupil of her father's, on the Indian medical staff.

Her sister repeated her kiss with—"Oh, you foolish, foolish Brat, whom I thought so enviable!"

"Why, Emmie! What do you mean? I always thought you liked Harry, though of course he never was one of your special friends."

"Oh, Harry, yes; he is a very good sort in his way. It isn't Harry I object to, but matrimony in the abstract."

The light in Ethel's happy eyes gave place to a look of anxious concern, as she turned round from the looking-glass. She put down her hat-pins and took her sister by the two shoulders, looking into her face. "Oh, Emmie darling, you don't mean you are not happy?"

Em laughed. "Now don't for goodness' sake look tragic! I assure you there is nothing in the world to look tragic about. Suppose we go down to the fire; it is horribly cold up here. Are you ready?"

But Ethel was not to be so easily put off. As soon as they were settled comfortably beside the drawing-room fire, she began again:

"Em, what is it? Why do you say these things?"

"Why, indeed! I acknowledge it is perfectly useless. I don't suppose one's own experience is ever of the slightest use to anybody else. If I said I was not happy, I don't imagine you would give up Harry a bit the more."

"Give up Harry! I should think not indeed. But there must be some reason for your talking in this bitter way about marriage. Do tell me; isn't Roger good to you?"

Emmie shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, good, yes; I suppose he is pretty good as husbands go. He does not beat me nor drag me down-stairs by the hair of my head, as you seem to imagine he might." Then she laughed again. "When you have been married as long as I have, Brat, you'll know better what to expect in married life, and by that time, unfortunately, under the present condition of affairs, your experience will be too late to be of any use to you."

"I can't understand it at all," said Ethel, distressed. "I did think if ever a man was violently in love, Dodge was with you."

"Oh, of course he was; only it is the nature of men to be different later on, don't you see? In early days there is nothing on earth he won't do for you, but he expects you to pay for it afterwards. He will be your slave for so many months or weeks, as the case may be, but when that is over you must be his for all the days of the years of your life. You are a fool if you make such a bargain with your eyes open."

"I don't care," said Ethel stoutly. "I don't believe Harry will ever want to make a slave of me, and if he should—why, Em, one likes to do things for the man one cares for."

"Does one? I don't." She tilted her chair back and clasped her hands behind her head. "The fact is I was born a generation too soon. The twentieth century will see a very different condition of things."

"Will it? I doubt it. I believe that in essentials men and women will always be pretty much what they have been from the beginning."

Em unclasped her hands, and sat up straight. "Good gracious, Ethel, where did you pick up such reactionary—such copy-book sentiments?"

"All I mean is, there is a point beyond which you can't go. All this change of fashions and of views is all very well— Nobody appreciates independence more than I do. But when it comes to the fundamental relations between men and women, you can't get behind nature; not all the women-lawyers, doctors, or professors in the world can alter it."

"Have you no faith in progress?" cried Em. "Woman is only now coming to her kingdom. Just see how we have been winning all along the line—the careers that are open to us, the positions we may take, undreamed-of fifty years ago. There is nothing we may not accomplish if we set our minds to it, and all pull together. We shall alter the marriage-laws before many years are over."

"If you do," said Ethel soberly, "you'll pull your own house about your ears."

"Well, marriage has not made me a renegade, and I never thought it would you."

"I am not a renegade. I believe as much as ever I did that it is a wholesome fashion for a woman to be less dependent and brought up to take care of herself if needs be; but I do think we make a lot too much of what has been done. We forget all the clever women of the past who have made great names, as well as all the rebellious ones who have tried to overturn things and couldn't. History goes round and round; the only thing is that we are so much more numerous now, and make more noise. To read the things in women's papers, one would think there never had been women who governed, women who fought, as well as women who wrote books, until the nineteenth century."

"They were exceptions."

"Perhaps they were. I grant you that activity is much more spread abroad. I am not concerned to assert that nothing has been done; still, when it comes to marrying— You know the old saw: When two ride on one horse, one must ride behind; and I don't think it ought to be the man."

"Well, no. I don't want to henpeck Roger," said Em laughing; "but I want to keep my own individuality. I object to being merged in somebody else. Surely I have a right to develop my own character, to live out my life on my own lines."

Ethel looked puzzled. "I don't believe in all that rot," she said bluntly. "Have you been getting up 'Queen or Slave,' or going in for an extensive course of Ibsen? After all, you know no one lives to himself —or herself. The development of one's character mainly comes through other people."

"Saul among the prophets!" cried Em. "Ethel quoting Scripture!"

"Was I?" said Ethel simply. "I did not know it; it is true all the same."

"What I maintain," said Em, still in rather a platform manner, "is that the institution of marriage as we have it is about to be swept away like other outworn superstitions; that rational women are no longer going to bind themselves for life to the blunders they may have made before they knew anything of the world they live in."

"But that would cut both ways."

"Well, let it."

Ethel left her seat and knelt down on the floor beside her sister, putting her arm round her waist. "Darling," she said, "I am quite sure you would not talk like this if you had not been bitterly deceived. Tell me. I am your own sister, and perhaps Harry and I could help you if there is any trouble. Do speak out openly."

Em drew herself away, with a little impatient movement. "My dear child, don't be so sentimental," she cried.

"I am sure there must be something, and I cannot bear to go out to India in ignorance and leave you; the others never were so much to you as I was. You might trust me. I always liked Dodge, still I can fancy him the sort of man who might be a little wild."

"Wild? Good heavens, no! I sometimes wish he was. What a little goose you are, Ethel. You know the one thing I never could endure was dulness, and dulness of the most pronounced type seems to be my

portion as far as I can see for the rest of my natural life."

"Dulness!" Ethel looked at her with perplexity clouding her kind eyes, and Em went on :

"You see I made a fatal mistake ; but how was I to know ? I was in too great a hurry, or rather Dodge hurried and whirled me on without giving me time to know my own mind. I believe upon my soul I should have drawn back at the last minute—I was beginning to get sick of it—if Knowles had not interfered ; but I was resolved we were not going to be beaten by him. But now it is all so different. I fancied I was marrying into Bohemia, which would have suited me well enough—I am not mercenary—and behold, I find myself in the camp of the Philistines."

"What do you mean ? I wish you would talk plain prose."

"Need you ask what I mean when you look round you ?"

Ethel looked round obediently at the cheap prettiness, at the crowds of knick-knacks and wedding-presents, the liberty-silk cushions and art-muslin drapings, the portières formed of strings of glass beads, the life-sized china monsters sitting in corners.

"Well," she asked, "what can you want more ? You always did know how to make your rooms look *chic*. Did you expect to live in a gipsy-tent or a caravan, or what ?"

"'Semi-detached and bow windowed,'" groaned Em, ignoring the question ; "the facsimile of some thousands of other semi-detached and bow-windowed 'genteel residences' in Pinecliff ; and I have two

maids—a nurse-housemaid, and a cook-general. Of course I am expected to play head nurse myself."

At this crisis of the threnody came the sound of a latch-key in the door, and a quick step in the hall, and in a minute Roger was in the room.

"Well, wife, how have you been getting on? Lunch ready? Ah, Ethel, that's right! How are you? So you have made up your mind to forsake old England; well, I hope you are going to be very happy. Em tells me Hancock is a good chap."

Then, almost before greetings and congratulations were over: "Have you seen the baby? I'll fetch her."

"Oh, not now, Dodge. Spare us the baby. I don't suppose she's dressed yet, and she must have her dinner in the nursery. I'll have her brought down when we have finished lunch."

"I want to see my little niece very much," said Ethel; "she was supposed to be asleep when I arrived. She must be grown since I saw her."

"Not much," said her mother briefly, and led the way to the dining-room as though disposing of an uninteresting subject.

"Well, wife," said Roger presently, when he had got through the carving, "you ought to be pleased with me; I have got you an engagement to sing."

"Have you? Good boy! Where?"

"At Tristerwood. They are contemplating a big music-party next month; chiefly chamber-music, but they want a little singing, and Lady Gilderdale proposed you."

"As the nearest approach to 'comic relief' that the severities of Tristerwood could permit, I suppose.

Well, I've no objection. And you are to boss the whole show, I conclude."

"The music, yes ; so I can insure your being well placed. It will be an audience worth singing to ; they expect a lot of people down from town."

"I don't like Lady Gilderdale," said Em, toying delicately with a rissole ; "she makes me feel pinch-beck somehow."

"Is she so awfully smart ?" inquired Ethel.

"That depends on how you use the word. In the American sense, I should say not; in the dictionary sense, most decidedly not, quite the other thing ; but in the newest sense—eh, Dodge ?"

"Well, they are quite the most swagger people we have got down in these parts, but they are awfully quiet. I don't know what Em means. She looks as smart again, in all her little furbelows."

"That's all you know about it. Why, when her Ladyship draws that ancient lace, that looks as if it had lain in a cedar chest for a couple of hundred years, up about her throat and glances towards me—she never really looks at you—I simply shrivel up and confess that I am imitation from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot."

"Who is this very magnificent lady ?" inquired Ethel.

"She is not magnificent at all," said Redway ; "that is the funny part of it—a little proud, perhaps, but very quiet and simple ; and you should just hear how meek they all three are when I am coaching them."

"Oh, I daresay. Musically they would lie down in the dust and let you walk over them, I don't doubt.

Well, I don't mind singing for them ; I suppose they will pay me well."

Roger looked at his watch and sprang up. "I must have my Betty," he said. "I have to be off in ten minutes. I'll go and bring her myself."

In a few minutes he reappeared and set her down just within the door : a wee mite of a child, clad in a "Kate Greenaway" garment, elaborately smocked, that reached almost to her toes, with a wide falling collar encircling the tiny neck and a string of amber beads. She toddled forward with great alacrity and self-possession.

"Oh, you darling!" cried the aunt. "Come and kiss me. What a tiny mite she is! Oh, Em, why do you dress her so old? She ought to be in baby things."

"The fantastic if not the grotesque is the only style for Betty. I flatter myself I have done rather well with that smock. In white baby-frocks she would look even uglier than she is. Besides she is so awfully precocious with her tongue and her feet, and knowing!—She is rather funny as she is, but as a baby she'd be a dead failure."

"She'll be all right when she fills out a bit," said Ethel, "and she has good eyes at any rate."

"Oh, do you think so? I think them so uncanny. They make me wonder sometimes how much she knows. Come here, you imp."

The child looked roguishly out of the corners of her eyes without moving. Ethel tried to take her on her lap, but she shook her shoulders. "Nun, nun, nun!" she cried angrily.

"I don't believe she'll come to anyone's knee but

mine," said her father. "Em always protests she won't have her made a lap-dog of, but I nurse her a bit sometimes. Betty"—he held out his hand to her —"come and tell me what you are."

"Uggy 'ittle dirl," responded Betty promptly, with cheerful philosophy, sidling round the table, steadying herself with her little claw-like hands on the edge.

"Nothing of the sort!" cried Roger, rather vexed. "Try again, Betty."

"Daddy's own dirl," as he took her up and she snuggled her head into his waistcoat. "Now dive Betty goo-goo."

"Cupboard love," laughed Em.

"I am not so sure. Would you believe"—turning to his sister-in-law—"this wife of mine is so terribly afraid of not being original that she pretends she doesn't like her own daughter; but Betty and I know better, don't we?" as he stroked the little rough head.

"You can keep up an affectation to that effect if it amuses you. Now I put it to you, Ethel, as a reasonable woman—which you used to be; I am not sure if you are now—Is one bound to express enthusiastic admiration for a remarkably wizened and under-sized brat, because for one's sins she happens to be one's own? It is one of the middle-class conventions I especially abhor. I think it is so bourgeois of Roger to make such a fuss with the baby. I never did care for babies; I always thought they would be a nuisance, and since mine from an artistic point of view is a failure as well, I don't see why I should not admit it."

Roger said nothing, but his mind went back in-

voluntarily to a morning a few weeks ago, when he had seen Lady Gilderdale's child. He saw that beautiful stately woman, whom most people thought proud and cold, sheltering in her arm the poor little misshapen idiot whom Heaven had been pleased to afflict her with. There had been no feigning in the tender tones which had made him think of the note of the wood-dove murmuring to her young. He kissed Betty and set her down.

"I must be going," he said. "Life is such a rush just now, Ethel, I don't seem to have had time to say anything to you. If you want any advice or help in your arrangements you must let me know. And look here, would you care for me to come to Southampton to see you off? I'll make time for it, if you would."

"Could you really? Wouldn't it be asking too much of you? You see it does feel a little bit lonely going off like this."

"Of course I'll come. I'd have offered before, only you all seem so terribly independent nowadays, I didn't know but you would be affronted. I think it is so plucky of you, going out by yourself, and so wise; it would have put Hancock to a lot of expense if he had had to come home and fetch you. Well, I shall keep my good wishes till then, and only say *au revoir*."

When he was gone Ethel turned to her sister. "I do think you ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said.

Em laughed. "My dear girl, please remember I told you those were mare's nests you were so bent on discovering."

XVII.

Roger was out of sorts, not to say out of temper. He had not been well all the summer; the heat had been excessive, and the languid air of Pinecliff had tried him, as it is apt to try strong people more than weakly ones. He certainly had had too much to do, but he was not so much overworked as over-hurried —a far worse thing. Trusting in his bicycle to annihilate time and space, he had accepted about twice as many engagements as he could fulfil properly, with the result that he was always late, and the continual effort to catch up got upon his nerves. He had a feeling, rather unreasonable under the circumstances, that he was bound to make up to Emmie for her disappointment as to any inheritance from his father, though he knew all the time that in frittering himself away upon overmuch teaching, he was being penny-wise and pound-foolish; for he left himself no time for the cultivation of his own talent, no time to keep the continual polish upon his faculties which was necessary if they were not to become tarnished, no time to keep pace with what was doing in the musical world. Most of his evenings now were occupied; when they were not he was too thoroughly tired out to do anything but fall asleep over the paper.

He would not own it, but he longed for the old days when he was First Violin at the Palm-house. He used to think it a grind, but the continual study

and practice of new music with his peers did far more for his own development and was infinitely more pleasurable than the drudgery of driving the rudiments into the heads of eternal children, of whom only one here and there could ever be made a musician. Unconfessedly he longed for Graham Knowles and the fertilising intercourse of mind with mind. A blight seemed to have fallen upon those new powers which had been putting forth bud and blossom at Tristerwood. He fancied he read disappointment in the faces there when he went, as he still did, to practise, and heard his own playing with their ears. That cut him to the quick, but he had got into a mill-round and could not get out.

A less clever woman than his wife might have seen what ailed him; a more sympathetic one would have managed and soothed her irritable musician, would have contrived leisure for him, or at least moments of restfulness, and so might have tided him over a difficult time. She, however, thought that, like a fractious child, he ought not to be humoured, and rasped him on principle. Moreover, she had her personal grievance against him, and bitterly resented it. Mrs. Temple-Smith's friend, Valentine Garcia, had told her that if she still wished it, he could obtain for her a small part in the "Geisha" in a provincial touring company; the manager was a friend of his, and it might prove a good opening. And Roger had put his foot down and forbidden her to accept it. He too knew the manager, and knew something of the company, and they were not people he cared to have his wife mixed up with. Moreover, he did not choose to have her indebted to Garcia. It would have been wiser if he

had put his objections before her candidly, but he unluckily offended her by telling her bluntly that she was not equal to it, either by training or physique; if she did not break down in a week, which was probable, she would never get beyond minor parts. After this she would not listen to a word.

Perhaps Em was not altogther to blame for beginning to fancy that her husband's affection for her had waned. In the daily familiarity of wedded life, the worship and observance of early days had worn out, to be replaced by a certain brusqueness and masterfulness that belonged to him. He made considerable demands upon his wife, and expected his wishes to be carried out as a matter of course. His was an exacting personality, with a dominant note of egotism in it, and Em's was too much of the same order to accommodate itself. Then too, whereas at first he had found a certain piquancy in her coldness and perversities, he now began to resent them, and assert his own rights a little more roughly. These grievances were carried to Emmie's new friend, and interpreted by her according to her own views.

"Ah, *Chérie*," she said, "it is what we all find. While you are a new toy, a man cannot do too much for you; by and by, when he has got used to your beauty and ceases to care for it, he wants a mere drudge. You must assert yourself bravely."

"I do," said Emmie; "I never allow myself to be put upon."

"I wish," said Portia, looking at her with mesmeric eyes, "I wish I could inspire you with courage to act as I should act in such a case. Your example might prove a blessing to thousands."

Em kindled. "Perhaps I will some day."

But now Mrs. Temple-Smith had left Pinecliff, and Em felt that she stood alone.

One morning Roger came in earlier than usual; a postponed lesson gave him an unlooked-for hour of leisure. Emmie was practising, and went on, not regarding his entrance. He walked about the room with his hands in his pockets for a minute, took up a book and read a few pages, standing, then flung it down.

"I wish to Heaven, Em, you would have the sense to stick to the music that suits you. What on earth have you got hold of there?"

He glanced over her shoulder, then sang in an absurd falsetto:

"See where the aspens quiver
And poppies yearn with pain;
For the mists are on the river,
And the moon is on the wane."

He turned to the title-page. "Red Poppies," by Valentine Garcia. Inscribed to Mrs. Redway—"Rose Alba."—"Pshaw! It is a mystery to me how a fellow who can play as he can, could bring his mind down to such tommy-rot as that. The music matches the words: I will say that for him."

Em's cheeks grew as red as the poppies as she snatched the song out of his hand, and flung it skimming along the top of the piano.

"It is quite out of your line, I admit," she remarked. "The critique in *The Lyre* last week said it was throbbing with poetic sensibility."

Roger laughed mockingly. "I'll give the composer some more poetic lines to set to music for you. How would this do?

"If only to-day were to-morrow,
And yesterday followed to-day,
My sadness would turn into sorrow,
My vanity vanish away."

"I suppose you think that is witty," said Em, turning half round. "To me it is simply silly."

"Oh, I don't lay claim to the wit. Look at *Punch* for the week before last. I can't stand that style of sentiment."

"Nor any style of sentiment—in music. Do you know it came round to me the other day what your friend Lady Gilderdale thinks of your playing. She said to somebody: 'Oh, he plays very well, but I don't care for it; he has no feeling.' They think you a mere machine."

That stung, but he had too much personal dignity to reply to it. He gnawed his moustache for a moment; then he recovered command of himself.

"Seriously, Em, you'll damage your voice if you force it into Garcia's gush. It doesn't suit you a bit. Go back to your old French *Chansons* and things of that sort. I want you to practise 'Si tu Savais' for Tristerwood next week, and you must be at your best; it is to be a big thing. You have quite roughened your upper register, trying to pump up passion that isn't in your little bird-trills at all. Try and smooth it out by a little gentle practice."

"I am not going to sing 'Si tu Savais' at Tristerwood. I intend to sing Mr. Garcia's Rondo and Triolet."

"My good girl, you'll do nothing of the kind. I have the arrangement of the Tristerwood programme,

and I shall take good care to put you down for things I know you can sing."

"I certainly shall not be dictated to because I have the misfortune to be your wife. I shall tell Sir Hervey what I mean to sing, and if he does not wish for those things he can engage somebody else; I shall not appear."

"Misfortune or not, you'll have to do what I tell you!" cried Roger angrily. "I won't have you make a fool of yourself or me at Tristerwood." And he went out, slamming the door behind him.

Matters did not go very smoothly with him that afternoon; he had a bad headache, and the self-control so needful in a teacher of music, had been rudely shaken. First he had a lengthy worrying practice of concerted music in a girls' school. The principal was a lady of some ambition, and aspired to create a regular Ladies' Orchestra out of insufficient material. When he insisted on teaching the young ladies things within their capacity, she blamed him for keeping them back, and wondered why they were not allowed to study music suitable for the Queen's Hall. On this occasion she detained him nearly twenty minutes while she expounded her views. Then he spent an hour over a beginner with no ear, and another with a sensitive young woman who wept when he scolded her. As tears and tempers seemed to dog his steps, he began to think he must be taking after old Doctor Redway, who had an appalling reputation, and of whom a story passed current in Dronechester, that he once in his rage shut the piano down upon the hands of a particularly dense pupil, and nearly broke her wrists. Luckily for learners, that style of *maestro*

is now out of date, and Roger felt that he must deny himself any such relief to his feelings.

He did not get in to tea, but that he rarely had time for; and that night he had to dine rather early, as he was playing at a concert at a distance. He looked into the drawing-room on his way up to dress. Emmie was sitting in a low chair beside the fire, in her morning-dress, her pretty feet on a hassock, and an air about her whole person of not having the smallest intention of moving. The dancing firelight gave a warmer glow than usual to her soft cheek, and threw reddish lights on the folds of her purple gown. She was reading a novel; she just glanced up at his entrance, then went on with her book. He made up his mind to show no remembrance of their little tiff of the morning.

"What, not dressed, Em! Why, aren't you coming with me? I thought you wanted to hear Clara Butt."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't feel inclined to turn out, thanks. It's cold, isn't it?"

"Yes, the nights begin to feel wintry. Well, just as you please of course. I must go and dress."

Presently his impatient voice was heard calling from the floor above:

"Em! Em! Where are my gold studs? You've not put me anything out."

She intended to take no notice, but habit was too strong; she had got to the foot of the stairs before she remembered.

"I suppose they are where you put them when you took them off last time."

"Well, but I don't know where my things are. Look here, you've not so much as laid me out a clean

shirt, and there you sit doing nothing. How am I to get dressed in time? And my shaving-water hardly off the chill."

Em sailed up with wonderful stateliness for her inches, and stood at the dressing-room door.

"You had better understand once for all," she said, "that I have my own concerns to attend to, and I don't see why I am to waste my time looking after yours. If you want to be waited on hand and foot, you had better engage a valet."

He whistled. "Sulking still about Garcia's songs; silly little woman," he said to himself. Well, it would probably take longer now to make his wife find his things than to find them himself, so he accepted defeat for the moment, and came down to dinner with neither headache nor temper much improved. He intended to make it up with his wife, but to have to struggle into a dress suit and adjust a white tie correctly in seven minutes and a half, does not leave much time for propitiatory scenes, and Emmie was already at the table when he got down, and the servant in and out of the room; so he ate a hasty dinner almost in silence, and had to hurry away before the pudding was carried out. His fresh exasperation had had time to cool, and he did not want to go out without a word: he looked in again, struggling half into his overcoat, while she was still toying with her plate.

"You need not sit up for me," he said; "I may very likely be late. Gregson wanted me to have supper with him after the concert, and as you are not coming, I may as well: so I shan't want anything. You can turn the gas out, and just put me a candle and matches."

She took no notice, and he finished hoisting on his coat and came in.

"Em."

She just turned her head a little inquiringly. He went up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders to make her look at him. "Do you know you have been very cross to me all day?" he said. "Make it up before I go out."

He stooped his face to her, but before his lips could reach hers, they were brushed aside by a stinging flick more like a blow than he cared to think. He drew back.

"You little spit-fire!" he said.

As he ran up-stairs to fetch his forgotten cigarettes, some impulse made him, late though it was, spring up the next flight to the nursery to snatch one look at the baby, whom he had not seen since the morning. She was sitting on her nurse's lap before the fire, drowsily counting her own pink toes, too sleepy even to clamour to him to take her, as she always did at sight of him.

"What, not in bed?" he cried. "Why, I thought you always put her to bed at six."

"Mistress did not wish her put to bed so early to-night," said the girl. "I don't know why, I am sure; for she never cares to bathe her herself like some ladies. Don't rouse her up, please, sir; I was just getting her off to sleep."

"I won't rouse her." He knelt down an instant and kissed the little drowsy face and the wee toes, and raced down-stairs again. He was glad afterwards that he had gone up.

The concert was a weariness to him; the pro-

gramme seemed ill-chosen, the audience unsympathetic. He played badly, and he knew it and did not care. Only he was glad none of the Tristerwood party were there. All the time he was fretting to get back to Em and make it up. They had had many a little tiff before, but never so decided a quarrel as this. Was it possible she really resented his strictures on Garcia? He did not like to think so; he hated the very idea that Em should take so much interest in any other man as to mind what he said about him. He had never felt jealousy before; he had had no cause: Emmie's indifferent temperament and his own self-confidence had kept him from that; now for the first time he felt the agonising grip of suspicion. Could it be that Garcia was in Pinecliff, and she knew it, and was expecting him that evening? He was a man who went and came as the whim took him; he was supposed to be abroad, but what was to hinder his having returned? Then with a strong effort Roger thrust the notion from him. What cause had he to imagine any such thing? None. He would not insult Em nor humiliate himself by letting such a thing rest in his mind for an instant.

After all, the words they had had about the song were only the proximate cause of the quarrel. There had been friction for a long time, and now, as he looked back, he saw that they were drifting into an estrangement. He would not let it happen; he could not bear it. With all her whims, her perversities, she was his treasure, his heart's delight. He was furiously angry with her for the way she had received his overtures, but angry or not, he could not grow cold to her. He was longing impatiently to get home, to take her

in his arms, and make her ashamed in spite of herself. In good sooth he knew that he had been selfish and cross and dictatorial lately; if he admitted as much on his side, she might surely yield something on hers.

He was very poor company at the supper, and got away as early as he could. It was not so very late; perhaps she would be sitting up for him after all, repentant, sweet, with kisses to make good that blow. He pictured it to himself as he fitted the key into the lock. But the hall was dark. He closed the door and groped his way to the table—no matches! However, a man who smokes is rarely without the wherewithal to get a light. The vesta he struck revealed the fact that there was no candlestick either, and his reviving tenderness was checked by annoyance that his wife's tantrums should take the form of a petty and irritating neglect. His hands were cold, and just as the vesta went out and he was about to strike another, he let fall the box. It really seemed as if it had dropped clean out of the universe; he felt and felt for it in vain, and at last gave it up and groped his way up to the bedroom, astonished at finding the door open. There was a sensation of chill emptiness, and he stumbled over a chair in an unaccustomed position.

The noise must have wakened a sleeper, but there was no sound from the bed.

"Em," he cried, "Em, are you awake?"

No answer. A horrible dread came upon him lest his house might have been broken into in his absence, lest he might find— His heart almost stopped beating, and it seemed an endless nightmare till he could fumble his way to the dressing-table and feel about for matches. A light at last, and he turned to the bed

sick with apprehension, and for a second or two unable to see anything for the dazzle of sudden light. Then it cleared. The embroidered coverlet lay smooth and undisturbed, the pillow undinted, not a rumple anywhere; clearly Em had not been in bed at all. Something must have happened; the baby must be ill. He sprang up-stairs, two steps at a time. All was silent; the nursery door was locked. He hammered loudly upon it and called: "Em, Em, are you there?"

Presently a sleepy frightened voice: "Good lawks! Whatever is it? Is the house afire?"

"No, no. Where's your mistress? Is anything the matter with the baby?"

"The baby is gone with her mamma, to be sure. Didn't you know, sir?"

"What! I can't hear you. Get up and come and speak to me."

"Wait a minute then, sir, and I'll come."

There was the sound of a match scraping, and the thud of heavy shoeless feet upon the floor. He drew back and sat down on the top of the attic stair, leaning against the little gate which had been put to keep Betty's toddling footsteps from straying into danger.

Gone—with her mamma! What could the girl have meant? He tried to keep himself from thinking, from wondering. Perhaps one of Em's sisters was ill; some hasty summons must have come while he was out—But then, why take the child?

In a minute the servant came out onto the landing, her tousled hair falling over her eyes, her gown buttoned all awry over her nightdress, and a shawl on. He rose to his feet with a sort of instinct that if he had ill news to meet, he would sooner take it standing.

"Well, sir, I don't know what to say, I'm sure," she began, on the defensive before he had opened his lips. "Missis never give me no message."

"Where is your mistress?"

"I don't know, sir. She never said where she was going, to me nor yet to cook. Directly minute you was gone, she come up-stairs and told me to dress Miss Betty in her pelisse and her second-best bonnet, and Cook was to call a cab. And that's all I know, if you was to ask me till the day of judgment."

"Do you mean she has gone away?" he repeated, dazed.

"Yes, sir; gone away in a cab as I tell you; her and Miss Betty too, and I heard her tell the man East Station."

"Did she get any letter or telegram?"

"No, sir: the post was in before you left, don't you remember? And you got all them circulars, and there wasn't no telegram come. There wasn't time after you was gone: she come straight up-stairs as you banged the door."

"Did she take any luggage with her?"

"Oh law, yes, sir. Her dress-basket and a port-manteau and her bonnet-box and another box with the baby's things. She was packing all the afternoon. She pushed the little things under the bed when they was finished, out of the way, and her dress-basket always did stand under the window, you remember; you wouldn't notice that, not when it was shut down. I'm surprised you took no heed of the box in the nursery when you come up; but there, gentlemen never notices anything, and 'twasn't my place to say

nothing. Besides, how was I to know she was going away unbeknown to you?"

His lips went very white. Packing all the afternoon! She must have meant it then, and planned it all beforehand. Why—oh, why? But he could not stop to think of that yet.

"Call the cook," he said.

"What, now, sir? In the middle of the night?"

"Of course. Do you think I am going to bed without getting to the bottom of this?"

In a very few minutes Ellen reappeared with the cook, who seemed to be more excited and pleased at being mixed up in what promised to be an interesting mystery than annoyed at having her slumbers disturbed. She corroborated the statements of the other, but had nothing to add beyond having overheard something about catching the eight-twenty, and a gratuitous speculation of her own relative to "that long-haired gent that used to come so often in the summer"—a speculation that Roger silenced angrily.

It was all very well for him to say that he would not rest till he had got to the bottom of the mystery, but so far it appeared to be bottomless, and till morning there was but little that he could do. He dismissed the two servants to their interrupted slumbers, though they were more than willing to help him in his investigations; he preferred to carry them on alone. He resolved to search the house carefully for any clue as to the reason of Em's going. She might have left a letter for him somewhere; he would rather look without those prying maids.

The dining-room was precisely as he had left it, ex-

cept that the dinner had been carried out; the cloth was left on ready for breakfast, according to a slovenly habit Ellen indulged in when she thought her mistress would not catch her. There was nothing on it but the flowers and a few knives and forks. Nothing on the writing-table, nothing in the blotting-book. In the drawing-room he missed a few things: all Em's songs were gone from the music-waggon they shared. They had been sorted out from among his things, and the latter were tidier than they had been for a long while. Several photographs of her special friends were missing too.

In her own room the look of disorder that follows a hasty packing was evident, and he wondered that he had not noticed before the absence of her little array of silver-backed brushes, her powder-puff and button-hook—the dressing-table looked so bare without them. All her drawers and hanging-cupboards were empty, and the little frilled bag containing her night-dress was gone from her pillow. She had cleared everything as if she had gone away—to stay.

Ah! there was something left; a little pair of half-worn slippers, too shabby to be worth taking. He caught one up and drew a long sobbing breath; then a gust of anger swept over him, and he flung it violently away.

No, there was no note, no message, no clue why she had gone. Had she wanted to break his heart, or had she thought he would not care?

His search had taken him a long while, and when it was over and there was no more that he could do, he realised how tired, how dreadfully tired he was. He would sooner have lain down in his grave than in that

room out of which she had vanished. He went downstairs again and threw himself, dressed, on the dining-room sofa, with a rug over him, listening, wide-eyed, to the striking of the clocks, hour after hour, and watching for the dawn; now and then sinking down just so near sleep as to come back with a start to wonder what had happened to him, and why he was there.

XVIII.

ERCOLANI, as it chanced, had occasion to see Knowles privately before the morning rehearsal, about some business of his own; so he went round to his house early with that intent. Some one else was beforehand with him, however; he found the Infant on the doorstep, kicking his toes against the scraper. Bertie had grown very tall this last year, quite beyond the possibility of Eton jackets any longer, but his name of Infant Prodigy still stuck to him. He made himself useful to the Conductor, in various capacities, and was apt to give himself airs of being indispensable on the strength of it. The Italian nodded to him, not overpleased.

"The Boss seems to be having quite a levee this morning," Bertie remarked. "There's somebody with him now. I heard them talking awfully loud; the dining-room window is not quite shut."

At that moment the door opened. The servant looked doubtful.

"I don't know whether master can see you, I'm sure; he's engaged just this minute. Master Wills, you had better step inside and wait in the hall."

"I'll wait too," said Ercolani. "Tell him I want to see him for one moment; I won't detain him long."

"Very well, sir.—Oh my!" as sounds of a rather unusual nature made themselves heard from the room behind her. First a voice raised in a tone of con-

temptuous anger: "I don't know where your wife is, and if you don't, the more shame to you;" then a bound, a scuffle, and a crashing fall.

The Italian was in the room first, and with the deftness of a man not unused to scenes of violence, seized the aggressor by the arms from behind. It was Redway, panting, crimson, beside himself with rage, and struggling to free his pinioned arms, though he had no intention of again attacking his adversary, who had not yet risen to his feet, having fallen partly under the table, and dragged down the corner of the cloth with two or three cups and plates, and being more or less entangled with the débris. It was perhaps as well, or a fight must have ensued. The maid, looking in behind Ercolani, began to utter piercing shrieks of Murder! Help!

"Be quiet, will you!" cried Ercolani. "We don't want the whole town in. Wills, take her away."

And Knowles, beginning to emerge, called out, "Hold your tongue, woman, and leave the room!"

The Infant, with great presence of mind, closed with the hysterical Anne, who was about to improve the situation by becoming rigid, and conducted her with his arm round her waist to the top of the basement stairs, where he pushed her inside and bolted the door. Then he returned to the scene of the fray, with curiosity no less keen than hers.

Knowles was in the act of struggling to his feet, with the look of furious shame of the man who has been knocked down, and with a coughing and choking in his throat that spoke of some one's knuckles there a minute before.

Ercolani still kept his grip of his prisoner, though

the strong young sinews could have shaken off those weak slight arms in a moment; but, the sudden impulse of fury slaked, Redway had no desire to inflict further damage on the man who had mocked him. He let himself be pushed out of the room. The Italian looked back over his shoulder to see the other on his legs again.

"You are not hurt?" he asked curtly.

"Oh, he is!" cried the Infant. "Look, his head is all bleeding."

"It's nothing," said Knowles sullenly, pressing a handkerchief against a cut in the side of his temple. "I must have struck the foot of the table in falling."

"Shall I go for the doctor?" said Bertie, always ready for an errand. "I'm sure it ought to be sewn up."

"Nonsense! A basin of water and some sticking-plaster are all I want. You can get me those if you will." He sat down and leaned his elbow on the table: he was feeling rather sick and giddy. "And for goodness' sake, somebody go and quiet those wretched maids." For Anne and her colleague, finding themselves imprisoned in the basement, were setting up a duet of the most unmelodious character. "Tell them there is nothing earthly the matter—a little horse-play, and I caught my foot. Don't let them come near me, mind."

Bertie went off delighted with his errand, which he performed very effectually by first throwing a pail of water over the pair, and then coolly rummaging in Anne's work-box, amongst all her treasures and love-tokens, for a piece of sticking-plaster. Ercolani mean-

while had pushed Redway, unresisting, out of the front door.

"You wait here a moment," he said, relaxing his grip. "I must go back and speak a word to Knowles, and just see the extent of the damage."

He re-entered the room. "Let me look," he said, removing the handkerchief. "It bleeds still, but I don't think you will want those surgical needles the Infant was so anxious to see applied. It doesn't seem deep, but there is a bruise further back. Are you hurt anywhere else?"

"No," he said sullenly, and muttered something between his teeth about "a savage, unprovoked assault."

"What was it all about? I thought you had nothing to do with Redway since—"

"No, nor with his wife either. The insolence of his daring to come here and ask me—"

"What do you mean? What is to do with his wife?"

"She has left him—bolted."

"Left him! Poor fellow; I expect he is more than half beside himself. You might have had pity on him."

"Pity! A worthless cold-hearted little minx he is well rid of!" said Knowles vindictively.

"I'll wager he doesn't think so, poor lad. Now then—" as Bertie re-entered with a basin and towel, a small bit of sticking-plaster and a huge pair of scissors—"now let me see if I can plaster up this place for you. Hold still!"

"Let alone; the Infant can do that. You go after that hot-headed young fool, or he'll be doing something to himself next."

"Very well. Shall I tell Dacre to conduct for you this morning? Headache, I suppose?"

"Better say I have had a slight accident: the plaster will betray me."

As he went, Ercolani beckoned the boy into the passage.

"Look here, Infant, not a word outside these doors, mind."

The lad's face fell a little. Already he had been rehearsing in imagination a thrilling history of how he had rushed in and helped to separate the combatants before murder was committed—with certain reserves of course, but still circumstantial enough to arouse an absorbing interest. The excitement of participation was robbed of half its charm.

The Italian took him by the shoulder, and gave him a little shake. "You mind what I say!"

"Well, of course I don't want to go blabbing like a girl; but you don't suppose the thing is going to be hushed up, with those two screaming women in the kitchen?"

"Very likely not, but it is not to get about through you or me. There's a certain loyalty due from us both."

"Oh, all right. Perhaps after all," he could not resist adding, "I know more about it than you do." For he remembered about the bangle, and shut his lips tight with an air of mystery.

Ercolani was just going out of the door when the boy rushed after him again.

"Oh, I say, you don't think Knowles will set the police on him, do you?"

"No, you little fool. I should say he will want it forgotten."

"Because he'll be an awful sneak if he does; you know Dodge saved his life."

"I know. Now don't waste time talking. You go back to your man and let me see after mine."

He hardly thought Roger would have waited, but he had, being in truth too dazed to know what next to do. He stood by the gate, savagely beheading the tall sunflowers and Japanese anemones as though they had been evil weeds. He looked round at the sound of footsteps, with a smouldering wrath in his eyes.

"Well," he said in a harsh tone, "I haven't killed him, I suppose."

"No, and I don't suppose you meant to, unless you're quite mad. What on earth could have possessed you to attack him? The very last man in the world, I should think, to wrong you in the way you suspect."

"I did not suspect him. I know well enough he has neither heart nor courage enough to have robbed me. I went to him to demand the address of the man I do suspect, and when he refused it and scoffed at what has befallen me, I just went for him."

Ercolani's heart was full of pity, but he felt that Redway's mood was too savage to bear any expression of it just then. He only said: "Can I do anything for you?"

"Get that address out of him. I had better not go back; but I don't mean to leave this house without it."

"Whose is it? Whom do you suspect?"

"Valentine Garcia."

"But he is in the south of France."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Certain. And moreover Knowles does not know his address. I heard him say he must wait till he heard from Garcia, to fix the date of the new Concerto, as he did not know where to write: so you can't get it from him."

"It is to be found somewhere I suppose. And wherever he is, I mean to track him down."

"But look here; have you any reason to conclude he is the man you want?"

Roger gave a mirthless laugh. "Not the slightest, except that he is the only one I can think of. I haven't a shadow of proof: no one went away with her. She simply vanished out of the house, and such things don't happen unless—"

"Well," said the other, "what do you mean to do?"

"Do? How should I know? What does one do in such a case?"

"There are agencies," began Ercolani slowly.

"Agencies be d—d!" shouted Roger. "Do you think I would set hounds to track her down?"

"You might make inquiries at the station, and find out what place she took her ticket for."

"Of course; that is what I meant to do, but I am in such a maze."

"Let me go with you: I might be of use."

"All right," said Redway ungraciously, without the smallest expression of thanks. "I suppose you think I am not to be trusted not to fell the porters."

"Well, I think the less you show in it the better.

You don't want to make any row or scandal, as long as it is to be avoided, and you are naturally a bit excited."

"Excited! I think I must be going mad," he said very quietly. "Every now and then it comes over me that I must be mad already, and have dreamed this: it could not possibly have happened. Em wasn't like that; she never was that kind of woman."

Then he was silent, and kept silence till the station was reached.

"You wait out here," said Ercolani. "I will go in and ask; but first tell me what time it was, and what she was wearing."

"In time for the eight-twenty train. She had on a purple gown with fur round her wrists." His face contracted: he saw her so plainly, sitting by the fire, with the reddish light warming the purple folds. "She would have her fur cloak—it was cold. And she must have been carrying the little girl: she did not take a maid."

"The little girl! Then you may depend upon it she has not gone to Garcia. I don't say he might not lure away another man's wife; but he is not the fellow to saddle himself with another man's child, however much in love he might be."

Ercolani went in, and Redway sat himself down on the handles of a luggage-barrow, picking holes in the asphalt with his stick. In a minute his friend came out again.

"Had the child a red cap on?"

"No," cried Roger irritably, "a bluey-green pelisse and a little bonnet to match. I had better come myself."

It appeared that it was the last day of cheap tickets from town, and so many "ladies" carrying babies had gone up by that train that the ticket-clerk grew quite confused and nervous under Redway's peremptory cross-examination. Only one traveller seemed to lend herself at all to the description of Em—the one with the red-capped baby, but it was a stopping train, and he could by no means recall to what station she had booked. He was inclined to think that if she had been going to town, she would have taken the seven-forty, which was an express; but Roger knew good reason why she should not have done that. Next they tried the porters, one of whom was certain he had labelled the lady's luggage for Southampton. He had taken particular notice of the child: she was such a 'cute little party, something like his own little 'un.

"Southampton!" said Roger, very white. "There, Ercolani, you see. She could easily cross from Southampton to Havre, go on to Paris, and catch the Lyons mail."

"Well, go you to Southampton then, and inquire there, if it will ease your mind; but don't go rushing off till you learn something definite. I wish I could go with you, but I must be off to rehearsal now."

Roger nodded, and parted from him without a syllable of thanks. He was past paying decent civilities to any one.

It was something to be doing, to be in the train and in motion; the hedges and trees flying past gave a certain feeling of relief. It was a quick train, and he was soon at the Docks asking questions. It was much the same as at Pinecliff: so many ladies and so many

babies, and no one could quite recollect where they had all gone to. To Roger it seemed that his own Em, his own Betty were so absolutely unlike any other woman and child in the universe that it was incredible it should be so difficult to identify them. He sent a telegram to Havre to learn who had landed from last night's packet, and on the French side it appeared they were much more acute. He got an accurate description of every one in the least answering to his wife and child, but no one seemed to quite tally. The woman in the fur cloak with the red-capped baby, whom he had heard of at Pinecliff, had been among the passengers, but on close inquiry it transpired that she was tall. Still, French people's ideas of size in women were different from ours; perhaps the clue might be worth following up. As to the red cap, Em might easily have bought such a thing for the journey. There did not seem to have been any other child so young. Still it might be a wild-goose chase after all.

The telegraph-clerk, who got quite interested, made the practical suggestion that Redway should wait till afternoon and interview the stewardess of the returning packet: if he learned that they had been on board, he could then cross in pursuit that night. It seemed an excellent suggestion—but how to get through those hideous waiting hours? He went to an hotel and ordered some lunch: it was at any rate something to do; but when it came, he did little but look at it and pay for it. He drank a glass of beer, which made him feel a little more like himself, but in his state of suspense and nervous tension, food made him sick. Then he roamed aimlessly along by the margin of the water till he came to an

ancient stone bastion, the remains of some old fortification, where he sat him down among the snapdragons and valerian, and lighted a pipe. That comforted him a little, and took off the empty sinking feeling that was beginning to make him light-headed.

There was a dense sea-fog; silvery ripples came noiselessly out of it and washed softly over the brown and golden mud-banks, for the tide was low. A little way off, everything was dim, gray, colourless; close beneath his eyes, the streaks of green and yellow and tawny brown showed vivid between the spaces of opal water. Now and then a momentary shifting of the mists disclosed a phantom city clustering in a forest of masts and chimneys, brooded over by dreaming spires rising out of the clouds. It seemed as though he had got to the edge of the world, and sat looking into space. His own life looked like that too: he had got to the edge of the known, the familiar, the comprehensible; and what was to come next, he saw no clearer than he did the outlines of those dim uncertain turrets.

Presently he noticed that the water was lapping up against the stones below him; the tide was in then. He looked at his watch. Strange how slowly the time seemed to go. He held it to his ear. Of course! He had forgotten to wind it up last night, and it had run down. He rushed back to the Docks, lest the boat might meanwhile have come in, but the official of whom he made inquiry laughed him to scorn.

"In this fog, sir? Likely! However, it do seem to be lifting a bit. The wind may rise as the tide comes in, and she may get in later on."

Nothing for it but patience then, and to that rest-

less impetuous nature, patience meant torture. To be doing something—anything—would have been endurable; just to sit still and wait till some unknown indefinite moment when the fog might see fit to lift, seemed more than he could bear. Yet notwithstanding, he had to bear it, and it was nearly evening when some one came and told him the boat was in.

The stewardess was French, and it was not easy to make her understand his excited, eager queries. At last she seemed to grasp what it was he wanted.

"Mais oui. I recollect myself perfectly; ze tall lady *avec la petite. Très gentilles, mais très gentilles toutes les deux!*" with evident remembrance of a handsome tip, and high hopes of another to follow.

"Yes, yes, yes," she continued volubly, "zay were met by a *monsieur* on ze *quai.* I vatch zem depart in one *fiacre.* Ze *monsieur,* vhat he vas like? Ver' grand gentlemans, great beard, *comme ça, et gros!*" She spread out her hands in front of her waist to represent a rotundity which certainly was not Valentine Garcia's.

"I don't think it can have been they," said Roger in a dull despairing tone. "Tell me exactly what they were like."

"Ver' pretty lady, ver' tall wiv ze red hair, and *la petite,* a beautiful *enfant* like one wax doll."

Not even Roger's fondness could recognise his skinny little Betty under this description. He had spent his whole day following a false scent.

"That could not have been they," he said. "My wife is small and slight, and the little one, a tiny thing; she did not look a year old. Were there no others? Try and think."

Madame endeavoured to quicken recollection by placing a forefinger against her temple. "*Mais oui,*" she resumed after a minute's reflection, "surely there was one short lady, a little *embonpoint*, with a little girl about twelve year old, and also there was another lady with children, two little boys who were very sick—bad boys, those two."

Roger gave it up then. Clearly those he sought could not have been there, unless indeed Em had made it worth the stewardess's while to lie to him; but that seemed hardly likely, and when he had interviewed the two stewards also and the captain, and found their accounts of the passengers tally with hers, there seemed nothing for it but to go home.

It was nearly eleven when he got to his own door. A figure muffled in a greatcoat and comforter was lingering near the gate, and stopped him as he turned in.

"How have you prospered?" said Ercolani's husky voice. "I could not go home without knowing whether you had got back by this train. I called as I went down to the concert, and they told me you had not come. I wondered if you had gone on to France."

"There was nothing to go on for, as far as I could make out. They certainly were not on board that boat. I have wasted one whole day."

He was fitting the latch-key into the door as he spoke. Ercolani hated to see him disappear alone into the dark cold house where no welcome awaited him. He felt desperately sorry for him and longed to tell him so, but the gruff curt manner daunted him. He did not like to seem intrusive. The genial open nature of the typical southerner was not his; perhaps he had

lived so long in England that he had imbibed something of English reserve along with the fog that had chilled his blood. He nodded a good-night and went his way.

Although he was tired out, Roger found that going to bed that night was a failure. The empty place beside him would not let him rest. He got up and dressed, after an hour or two's weary tossing, and roamed about the house. He had a good mind to take his fiddle and try whether music would relieve him, but a saving recollection of the Miss Meaburys withheld him. He could not risk having them appear in their nightcaps to remonstrate. He went into the dining-room and took a book—he who never read, and sat with his eyes on the page, and the outer crust of his mind following the words. Then he thought of Ercolani. He wondered if he had felt like this when his house was left to him desolate. No, no! his beloved ones were dead: it was very different. He brought his hand down on the table.

"Would to God Em were dead before she had done this!"

Then he sprang up and began to tramp about the room. What an awful thing to say—to think! Was this how men felt who murdered their wives? Horrible visions came before him of his hands at her slim white throat, and he felt in every fibre that he would sooner murder her than know her in any other man's arms.

The fit of passion wore itself out presently, and he sat down again. When Ellen came to open the dining-room shutters, she found him asleep with his head upon the table.

XIX.

"I HAVE come, you see; I have crossed the Rubicon."

Em advanced with both hands stretched out, with something of appeal, something of triumph in her manner, a good deal the air of a child who has just committed some escapade, and does not know whether to boast of her courage or deprecate the consequences.

"Crossed the Rubicon, have you?" said Mrs. Temple-Smith, rising from the breakfast-table with her hands full of letters, and kissing her visitor. "And how much does that mean, pray? That you have come up on the loose for a week's shopping and theatres, I suppose?"

"More than that a good deal," said Emmie, drawing up her slim throat. "I have done as you said. I have taken my life in my own hands and asserted my freedom."

When people follow our advice and embark on the course of action we have been urging upon them, they generally do it at the wrong time, and at this moment Portia felt inclined to wish that her young disciple had remained at home, minding her husband and baby. Since the time she was at Pinecliff lecturing, she had embarked in quite a fresh line of interests and occupations, and just now was by no means disposed to adopt the cause of a run-away wife.

"Well, sit down, my child, and have some breakfast. We will talk over your affairs afterwards."

"Oh, I have had breakfast long ago, thanks. I ought to apologise for coming so early, but I felt I must come straight to you. But I am afraid I am intruding. I'll come another time." She looked doubtfully at the lady at the other end of the table who was cutting the ham, and regarding her with coldly curious eyes.

"Intruding! Not a bit. I must introduce you to my new secretary, Miss Orman. You two ought to be kindred spirits. Mrs. Redway is one of my Pioneers, Gage—as she has just proved herself in good sooth."

The two ladies, thus recommended to strike up a friendship, eyed each other with no great promise of amity—rather after the manner of two strange dogs, similarly introduced and in too much awe of their masters to fight. Gage Orman was of the type in which other women can see nothing to admire, and which men either dislike violently or go quite wild about. Artists of a certain very new school were never tired of drawing her; men of a less degree of culture had been known to call her ugly. Emmie leaned to the latter view of her personal attractions, but there was no question but that she knew how to dress.

"Well, dear," continued the hostess, "if you really won't have anything to eat, sit down in the armchair and take your hat off."

Emmie never took off her hat casually: it was much too artistically combined with her hair. She sat down, however, and began to pull off her gloves. She was looking wonderfully pretty, with a light in her eyes and a pink colour in her cheeks: for the excitement

of what she was doing quite took off the fatigue of her late journey. Her little fair head, crowned with a most becoming toque, rose out of a fluffy feather boa with a dainty effect.

"I mustn't stay long," she said. "We went to an hotel last night: for it was too late to find lodgings, and I left Betty with the chambermaid; so if I am too long gone she will think I have levanted, and give the baby to the police."

"The baby!" cried Mrs. Temple-Smith. "You don't mean to say you have brought the baby?"

"Of course I have. Why, my dear Mrs. Temple-Smith, what else was I to do with her? I couldn't leave her. Mr. Redway is out all day. I don't see what he could have done with a baby not eighteen months old."

"Well, I don't see what you are going to do with her any the more. What made you do it, I wonder?"

Emmie herself would have been puzzled to say exactly what made her elect to take Betty. Her reasons were rather mixed. Beyond the one she produced, there was an undefined idea that the presence of the child made her own position less open to question. Openly she declared to herself that she was above suspicion, and she did not care what anybody thought; but all the same it came into her mind that if Roger knew the child was with her, he could not fancy anything. Further back, more unacknowledged still, lurked the notion that she would not leave the child for Roger to comfort himself with. She thought he cared more for the baby than he did for her: very well, then, he should not have the baby.

"Well," resumed Mrs. Temple-Smith, "the baby

certainly complicates the question; the baby is a nuisance. If it had not been for her, you could have taken up your quarters here for the present, but I really could not—"

"Of course not; I should not dream of such a thing!" cried Emmie. "I thought perhaps you could tell me of some nice rooms near you. And naturally I want to get some work. My old connection must be all gone to pieces; besides, I want to get something better than teaching. I am not penniless," she added; "I have got my own money."

"I dare say I could get you some pupils, but for anything else you must wait till Val comes back. He will be in town in a few weeks, and he'll look after you. By the way," she added, "I suppose you know that your husband can take the child away from you if he chooses—unless he has done anything very bad."

"Oh, he hasn't done anything," said Emmie, flushing up. "I thought you understood. I am sick of leading a maimed, cramped existence. I found that with him anything else was impossible. He is the sort of man who won't let you say your soul is your own. All this year I have been trying to assert myself, and I felt gagged, stifled: so at last I knew there was nothing for it but to break away."

"Well, are you prepared to relinquish the child if he demands her?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so; I don't particularly care about keeping her with me; only he doesn't know where we are."

"You're a little fool, if you're counting upon that. Why, my dear child, he'll trace you in a day. You'll

be at home before the end of the week, unless you're prepared to make a good fight for your freedom."

"I am," said Emmie, the light coming into her eyes again. "He can have Betty if he insists; he shall never have me."

"My dear, I know just how it will be. He will never understand the way in which you are acting. He will jump to the obvious conclusion—Men never think a woman can do anything without another man. He will be hunting up a possible lover for you; he will put detectives on your track, and within a day or two he will arrive, raving, and drag you off home with him."

"I should think he would have too much pride to make me go back to him if I don't choose. I should."

"Oh, my dear girl, men are different. At the bottom you always come to the savage instinct: the wife is a chattel to be whipped and locked up if she rebels."

"I wonder if I had better go abroad for awhile."

"No good at all. You would only postpone the tussle which is bound to come. No, I will tell you what I should do if I were you. Write to him, explaining your own position and your resolution. Tell him it is perfectly useless to interfere with you, and you do not intend to see him."

"He will come all the same: he will see the postmark and trace me by that."

Then Miss Orman spoke for the first time. "The cook is going for a holiday to-day to her friends in the country. Let her have your letter to post when she gets there. You need not say you are in town, or where you are. If he goes down to Fosbury to look for you, he won't find you."

So Em was established at the escritoire in Mrs. Temple-Smith's study, and left alone to compose an epistle that should make clear the position to her husband's mind, according to her own idea of it.

The letter in her large marked handwriting which lay beside Roger's plate next morning and put to flight all thoughts of breakfast, was certainly definite enough. As he tore it open with shaking fingers, his mind was vainly trying to forecast what he might find; but the reality was so unlike anything he had thought of, that the bold legible characters failed to convey any sense till he had read it twice. Here was no appeal for forgiveness, no despairing cry from a woman torn in two between love and duty. That he might have understood; but this—what could it mean? She wrote without any agitation:

"DEAR ROGER:

"I suppose when you realised I was gone last night you expected to find the orthodox farewell pinned to the toilet-cushion; but then you see I am not acting in the orthodox manner, and I thought it wiser not to write till my plans were settled. The reason I left as I did you will easily understand. You would have wished to dissuade me, and I preferred to avoid discussion. Not long ago you forbade me to follow the career for which I have always longed, and I resolved not to submit to this kind of dictation any longer. I am a human being as much as you are, and I consider I have a right to live my own life. Your views and mine are totally opposite on this as on most points, and since we are not in the least likely to convince each other, I am certain we shall both be happier

apart. Probably just now you are angry, but you will come to see that it is better. I have my own money and my own profession and am in no way dependent on you.

"I brought Betty with me, for I don't quite trust Ellen and I did not see how you could look after so young a child. You can of course see her by and by, when you have made up your mind to leave me unmolested. When you do you can put an advertisement into the *Daily Mail* and I will arrange it; till then I don't intend to say where we are.

"I suppose it is inevitable that you jumped at once to the usual insulting conclusion: I know what men always think when a woman takes an unusual step; but I can assure you you need have no suspicions of that sort. I am not with either of my sisters, nor do they know where I am, so it is no good your worrying them about me, but I am with a woman friend."

Apparently she had found a difficulty in ending; she signed herself merely "Yrs, E. R."

He read it through twice, first in eager haste and perplexity, then slowly and ponderingly. "Does she think I'm a stone?" he said as he laid it down. Agonising as his jealous suspicions of the day before had been, he felt now as if he could have forgiven her more easily if she had been swept away by a temptation too strong for her, than for the calm indifference of this. The humiliation of it stung like a lash.

He must see her; that was very certain—and without consenting to her conditions. He picked up the envelope which he had thrown down, and deciphered the blurred postmark with some difficulty: "Fos-

bury"—well, it was one comfort, she could not be hidden long in a little country town like that. What on earth could have taken her there? How strange that she should not have gone to London! He looked out the trains, and found he should just have time to make a few arrangements for the lessons of the day, and apologies for those of yesterday. He felt much calmer now, and his head clear and business-like.

The journey to Fosbury was very unlike flying in the express to Southampton. It was a cross-country line, and various half-hours in the train were interspersed with forty or fifty minutes waiting at lonesome out-of-the-way junctions with queer names. It appeared to be market-day in those regions, and the carriage was continually invaded by fat women with huge baskets smelling overpoweringly of apples, and further burdened with troops of very small children in very large boots, with now and then an old shepherd in a smock-frock of an obsolete pattern. He seemed to himself to have been travelling for hours, when at length he was deposited in a dull and ugly little town nestling under a lofty overhanging ridge of down.

The ticket-collector was of course the first person to examine, and he was perfectly certain that no lady had arrived late on the night mentioned. For a moment Roger was baffled, then he recollected that from Pinecliff Emmie could scarcely have arrived the same night at this out-of-the-way corner: most likely she slept somewhere on the way and came on in the morning. The man brightened at the amended question. "To be sure; There was a lady and a little girl come quite early, first train a'most, Wednesday." Asked

about the size of the little girl, he couldn't say for certain—a little tot that could just run about. As to where they could be found, he was less definite: the lady had asked for quiet lodgings, and he had told her of several, but he could not say which she went to. They might know at the Red Lion. Likewise they might not.

As Roger began to move off down the road, he called after him:

"In case that was not the party you was looking for, there was another young lady come later by the afternoon train, in a pink hat with green ribbons. A Miss Watkins, she was, one of Farmer Watkins's girls up to Latch Farm. She is in service in London and come down for her holiday."

Roger shook his head at the young woman in the pink hat; she certainly was not Em, and it never struck him that she was the one person in Fosbury who could have told him where to find her.

At the Red Lion he prospered beyond expectation, for after looking for rooms and not finding any to suit her in the place, the lady he sought had come there to hire a trap to be driven to Deerbrook, over Fortsdown Hill, where she had been told she might find what she wanted. She had mentioned that she wished to live very retired, and must have a healthy spot for the child. The man who had driven her was produced after a short delay, and deposed to having left her and the child and the boxes at Mrs. Whicher's, Rosebank Villa. As to a description of her, Roger soon found that was hopeless, as the man and the landlady contradicted each other on every particular. To follow and see her was the obvious thing to do. The trap was out

now, they informed him—both the traps; but the gentleman could have one in the afternoon if he pleased. Waiting, however, was the one thing he felt quite incapable of; he preferred to tramp the four miles over the hill, to the disgust of the Red Lion.

As he strode along the white dusty road he was trying to settle with himself how he would meet her. He was furiously angry with her—justly angry, and he had a notion that anger would serve him with Em better than tenderness. He had laid down his heart for her to trample on too long.

As he rose to the crest of the down, a magnificent panorama lay spread out beneath him, but he had no eyes for it. Below the chain of heavy earthworks with their gaping mouths, lay the wide harbour crowded with huge ships, the stately grace of the old men-of-war that lay at anchor, their labours done, contrasting with the unwieldy bulk of the new ironclads and the narrow fiendish-looking build of the torpedo-catchers; beyond stretched the great arsenal, dim with the smoke of innumerable chimneys, town linked to town as far as the eye could follow, and nearer the foot of the hill the long silvery arms of the harbour reaching up through the salt marshes. He did not even pause to look at the huge gray keep that rose out of the shallows at the head of the estuary, symbol of the strength of an earlier day, magnificent in its decay. He kept doggedly on till the ridge hid all the wide landscape from sight, and before him lay only the lanes trailing with blackberry and traveller's-joy, the great farms with their big barns and straggling outbuildings, the wide fields where the cattle were grazing and the sedges were turning pale straw-colour. Blind as

he was to it all at the time, it used to come back to him afterwards with a strange vividness like something seen in a dream.

Deerbrook at last, as he could tell by the name written up over the little post-office, and he had not yet settled what he meant to say. Well, he must leave it to the impulse of the moment now.

Rosebank Villa was not far along the street. It lay a little back in a small garden with square grass-plot and dahlias. It was red and flat-faced, with a French window on each side of the door—just the sort of cottage that the retired wheelwright or carpenter always builds for himself, and in which, after his decease, his widow lets apartments. It was evidently Mrs. Whicher herself who answered the door, a tall elderly woman with a red and gray knitted shawl pinned across her bosom.

"You have a lady lodging here, I believe. Can I see her?"

"No, sir; Mrs. White is at dinner," was the reply.

The fancy that she had gone back to her maiden name struck him like a blow. What had he done that she should so insult him? The commonness of the name never occurred to him.

"Nevertheless I must see her for a moment," he said. "Will you be good enough to go in and say so?"

"What name, sir?" queried Mrs. Whicher doubtfully.

"Never mind the name; just say some one wishes to speak to her."

"Mrs. White don't care to see no company; she

wouldn't even see our vicar when he called yesterday evening."

Thus protesting she stepped back and opened a door close by and asked the question of some one inside.

"Oh no, indeed; tell him I am engaged and can see no one."

What a low, husky voice she spoke in! She must have caught cold. He was not going to be baffled, however, with only a door between. He gently pushed the good woman aside, and entered a narrow room too small for the mahogany sideboard and big dining-table that filled it up. At the head sat a dark-haired woman in black with her back to the French window, and a small child was perched in a high chair at her side. She rose to her feet and stood leaning both hands on the table, looking at him through the steam of the roast mutton, and speaking volubly with some excitement.

"I know of course what you have come about, but it is perfectly useless. I tell you again, as I told the man they sent before, that I could give you no further information, not if you were to tear me with wild horses."

Redway looked at her with an amazement that for the moment struck him dumb.

"It is cruel that I should be subjected to this persecution," she went on, and her handkerchief went up to her eyes. "The only effect of it is to drive me from pillar to post. I did think I had got out of reach this time. And if it is lost, what good does it do me? I ask you that."

Roger certainly did not know. He endeavoured to

clear the situation by getting in a word. "I beg to apologise for this intrusion. I—"

But she broke in. "Oh, I am not blaming you personally. I dare say you are sorry for me. I know you are acting under orders. Your people send continually fresh ones. Last time he pretended to be the piano-tuner. But there is no piano here," she added with an hysterical laugh.

"I assure you, Madam, it is an entire mistake. I—"

"Of course it is a mistake, as they will find out when they have worried me into my grave. I know there was another will as well as they do, but what became of it I know no more than that child."

He glanced as she spoke at the little girl who was staring with round eyes over her mug—a red-cheeked solid little person who would have made three or four of his Betty. Through the maze of his own disappointment he perceived that there were other troubles in the world to-day beside his, and other people were absorbed in them to the exclusion of all else, though this morning it had seemed to him that the world was so wide solely that Em might hide herself from him.

The lady had paused to take breath, and he struck in once more.

"I am awfully sorry I forced myself in. I was under the impression I should find my wife here. I have nothing to do with you or your affairs. I can only say how sorry I am that it should have seemed as if I came to injure or annoy you. Pray make your mind easy."

He went before she had been able to grasp what he was saying. As he had his hand upon the gate Mrs. Whicher followed him down the path.

"One moment, sir, please, if you'll excuse me."

He waited, and she came close and spoke in a low voice, with a glance now and then at the French window.

"That lady—I'm a lone widder woman myself, and always much respected. I'm perticklar as a rule about references, but she seemed in a hurry to come in, and she bein' a pleasant-spoken young lady and me partial to children, I didn't make a p'int of it. But if there's anything against her, if you'd kindly name it —in strict confidence of course."

"I know nothing on earth about the lady; never saw her before in my life."

"I quite understand your not liking to speak, sir. I wouldn't do nothing unhandsome—not to turn her out in a hurry like, but a week's notice on either side: that has always been my rule."

"My good woman, I tell you I don't know anything about her; but for Heaven's sake don't turn out the poor lady on account of my unlucky coming. I fancied she was some one I am looking for."

"You are sure there is nothing against the lady? If there was and you could mention it confidential like, it should go no further. I am aware that in your business you has to be very secret."

"My business? Why, what on earth do you take me for?"

"Well, sir, I don't suppose you'd own to it if it was so; but I am pretty sure in my own mind that you are from Scotland Yard. I know something about it, my poor sister's first husband havin' been in the same way of business. Quite the gentleman he always looked too."

In spite of all his trouble and perplexity and the renewed disappointment, Redway had to burst into a fit of laughter. "I should make a precious poor hand at that trade," he said, "I am making such a mess of my first experiment. I wonder if, before I start to tramp back to Fosbury, you can tell me whether there is any other lady with a baby lodging in this village."

"Well, sir, I couldn't say for sure, but they do take lodgers at the Brambles, a farmhouse near a mile out of the village, Darracote way. I did hear tell as Mrs. Price was getting her rooms ready for a party."

She put him in the right way, and he walked on. The sight of the roast meat on Mrs. White's table had put him in mind how long it was since he had eaten, and he regretted that he had not asked Mrs. Whicher to give him something. He drew his belt tighter, remarking to himself with a grim smile that he was on the road to rival the celebrated camel who was brought down to a straw a day when his death unluckily interrupted the experiment. After all he did not feel nearly as hungry as he had yesterday.

The lane seemed interminable; he grew unspeakably weary of the long trails of dusty blackberries and the coarse stalks of mullein and yellow ragwort that fringed the way. By and by they vanished, or at least became dim and blurred, and the white road before him seemed to be sinking away from his feet. "I suppose this is how people feel when they faint," he said to himself; but he set his teeth hard and kept walking, walking on, and presently it cleared off and he found he was still plodding along. "It just shows what you can do when you make up your mind," he remarked.

At last the long low white house smothered in Virginia creeper and China roses, he had been told to look for, came in sight, and he turned into a short elm-bordered approach. His hopes by that time had gone so low that it was no surprise, hardly even a disappointment, to be told that the lady they were expecting that afternoon was a "party" who came to them every summer with three children, and the mistress of the house said she did not think he would find any other lodgers in Deerbrook at that time of year unless it was at Mrs. Whicher's.

He asked to be directed to the inn, but missed it somehow, and the road to Fosbury too, and when he got there the afternoon train was gone. Well, so much the better: he would as soon spend the night in the train as anywhere else. A night in the express is all very well, but broken by incessant changes and long waits at dreary forsaken little junctions, it is prolonged misery; but he was by that time in a state of restless fatigue that would hardly have let him keep still anywhere.

In scraps between one interruption and another, either trying to rest in the corner of the railway carriage or sitting on a hard bench in a draughty station, he thought it all out and resolved that he must give it up for the present. His anger was growing so deep and bitter that he was almost afraid to find Em; he scarcely knew what he might do. He must take up his life again as though there were no Em and no Betty in existence, nor ever had been. He must begin his work at once, and go on with his ordinary every-day occupations. He tried to say that if she could do without him, he could do without her, but that was a fail-

ure. He felt as if he had been seeking her three years instead of three days, and if it went on much longer he believed he should go mad. He had done with it, and to-morrow would be a new day.

By the time he reached Pinecliff it was already to-morrow.

XX.

So this was the new day; but it felt uncommonly like the fag-end of the old one. Redway had let himself in with the latch-key, for the servants had left the front door unbolted, not knowing when he might come back. He turned into the dining-room and opened the shutters, letting the daylight stream in upon the forlorn disorder of a forsaken room. A few notes and letters had arrived for him the day before; he eagerly scanned them, but when he found there was nothing either from or about Em, he hardly took in the contents. He threw them down, yawning wearily; then he caught sight of himself in the chimney-glass. Well, he should certainly look, and probably feel, better when he had shaved and dressed. The servants ought to have been down, and the kitchen fire lighted, by this time; Em had never let them lie late in bed. He would have to get his hot water himself, he supposed.

Late though it was for bathing, he had a hankering for the sea, for the bracing coldness, for the restfulness of lying in those mighty arms; but he would not yield to it. It was not only that he felt too weary to swim, but he did not dare trust himself. He was feeling so unutterably miserable, and a thought came to him how easy it would be to swim out—to keep swimming out until— He repelled it as cowardly, but he would not put himself in the way of temptation.

He came down-stairs presently, ready for the day's work, and remarking to himself that it was wonderful how well one got on without food or rest—for a certain length of time. For three nights now, a bath and a change of raiment had been his nearest approach to the night's rest which sets a merciful barrier betwixt day and day, but really it did not seem to do so badly. As to eating, why, if he resumed work, he must resume that, he supposed—only not this morning. He took the cover off the chops, but got no further. He rose from the table soon, after some coffee, and looked at the calendar that stood on his writing-table; but it had not been turned since Tuesday, and it took him some time to remember what day it was and what his engagements were: he forgot about the notes altogether. It appeared he had to go to one or two schools, including one at Eastern Green, and finish up his morning's course at Tristerwood, as Sir Hervey wished to rehearse some of the music for Thursday and make final arrangements.

Except for being totally unable to recollect what he had said last week and what was to have been practised for him, he got through his morning's work wonderfully well, and flattered himself that he was beginning to cease to think of his trouble. The October mists had cleared off and the brilliant sunshine that lighted up the greensward and turned the sunflowers and cactus-dahlias into points of fire seemed to burn his eyes as he stood on the steps at Tristerwood.

The butler looked a little surprised as he showed him into the music-room, which had not been prepared for occupation; the tall shutters were nearly all closed and a dust-sheet was spread over the grand

piano. The cool dimness after the glare outside gave him a strange feeling that made him suddenly wish he had sent word that he could not come. In a minute the servant reappeared.

"Will you step up-stairs, if you please, sir? My Lady will see you in the morning-room."

He followed the man up to the little sitting-room in the eastern corner of the house, which was Lady Gilderdale's especial sanctum, and where he had occasionally given her lessons.

"I am so sorry," she said; "I am afraid you did not get my note yesterday. Sir Hervey has got one of his asthmatic attacks and is not out of his room today. I hope he will be all right before Thursday: they don't generally last long. He may be quite able to rehearse Tuesday or Wednesday if you would not mind coming over again. Miss Fane has ridden into Pinecliff." She stopped, observing that he was not attending.

"Certainly," he said, "it will make no difference." He quite forgot to add that he was sorry for Sir Hervey's illness, and Lady Gilderdale reflected that he really was rather a bear.

"Since you are here," she continued, "I shall be so glad of the opportunity to go over some of the accompaniments with you. I want another practice of the Concerto very much. And I should like just to run through Mrs. Redway's songs; you can tell me just how she likes to take them. Shall we have first the one with violin obbligato?"

He wished she would let him go, but he had not the sense to say so, and when he tried to tell her that it was doubtful if Mrs. Redway would be able to sing

on Thursday, he was unable to frame a sentence. He walked silently to the window and stood there tuning up his instrument. Through the opening cut in the pinewoods he looked down to the mouth of the river which lay like a vivid picture framed in the dark pine branches. Why was it that the sight of the long links of sand-hills, golden in the October sunshine, the white sails sliding down between, the amethyst hills beyond, the ineffable peace and remoteness of it all, seemed like the turning of a knife in a wound? Lady Gilderdale was beginning to play, and after a short prelude of twining harmonies of violin and piano, came the moment when he could fancy Em's clear voice taking up the melody as he had often heard it. His fingers failed suddenly in a hopeless confusion. The accompanist paused and looked round surprised: any sort of failure was so unlike him.

"You are not well!" she exclaimed. She had thought when he came, how wan he looked. How stupid she had been not to dismiss him! He had turned his back to her and seemed unable to recover himself. For a moment she waited, then she went to him and saw that he was sobbing chokingly, gripping the window-frame till the knuckles started white. Tears in a man are either terrible or absurd. Judith was not a woman to tolerate weakness, but she recognised that this was anguish, and she respected it. She took the violin from his hand and made him sit down upon the sofa.

"Never mind," she said as quietly as one might speak to a schoolboy whose manhood has broken down; "don't fight against it so terribly, you only

make it worse. I am going to leave you a minute to get you something."

He had buried his head upon his arms among the cushions, and was past saying anything. Her first idea had been a glass of wine, but that involved ringing for Chadwin, in whose custody all such things were kept; and she felt too pitiful for Redway's distress to suffer it to be witnessed by any eyes but her own. She went to her own room and mixed a dose of a powerful nerve-tonic she kept by her; it would probably do him more good than the wine, if he could be induced to take it. She was purposely some minutes gone, but when she came back he was still in the same attitude, his head hidden, his strong frame shaking with those almost silent sobs. She waited quietly for a little, then she touched his shoulder very softly.

"Will you try to sit up a moment and take this? I think it will help you."

Her voice was tender but firm. He made an effort, and raised his head so that she could hold the glass to his lips, and he swallowed the contents obediently, though with difficulty. Then his head went down again, but gradually he grew calmer, and presently he raised it and leaned back, looking so terribly white that she feared he was going to faint, and reached him a vinaigrette that lay on a table near. It was some while yet before he could speak. She stood by the window that he might not feel that she was watching him.

"Thank you," he said. "You have been awfully good to me. I think that after this disgraceful exhibition I had better go."

"Presently. Stay quiet a few minutes; you are not fit to move yet."

"I don't know how to apologise," he went on, "for the impertinence of behaving like a child in your presence. The only excuse I can offer is that I have been travelling about for days in great distress of mind; I haven't been to bed for three nights, and I have had next to no food. When I could have eaten, I had no time; and when I could—I couldn't."

"You poor fellow, you must be starving! You must let me order you something. I can't let you go back like this."

"No, no, thanks; indeed, I would rather not. I could not touch anything." He started up. "I will go now."

She understood his reluctance to encounter the servants, and also the fact that in his present condition solid food would probably choke him; but she remembered, when she was out of the room, just now, meeting Sir Hervey's beef tea going in. It was most likely at his elbow still untouched, since he had a constitutional aversion to anything properly hot.

"Sit down again," she said; "I shan't be a moment." And he obeyed her.

She went into Sir Hervey's room and laid hands on the beef tea which, as she foresaw, was cooling on a little table beside him. "I want this, Hervey," she said without further explanation; "you are not in a hurry for it, are you? You can ring for Chadwin to bring you some more."

He was a little astonished as she went off with it, but too much absorbed in an article he was writing on "The Beautiful in Music" to protest against the

theft. She was rather afraid she might find her patient flown, but he was just as she left him, and he submitted passively to swallow what she set before him, being, in truth, too little used to being ministered to to resist it. She sat quietly beside him till she saw the colour beginning to come back to his lips, and the hand that held the spoon grow steady. Then she said:

"I am afraid you are in some very great trouble. If it is a matter in which Sir Hervey or I could help you, you must tell us; otherwise you need not say a word."

"It is what no one can help me in, but I would rather tell you; you must have thought me so strange, breaking down like that. I have lost my wife."

"Lost your wife!" she repeated with an amazed look.

"Yes. Oh, she isn't dead. If she were," he added with a short laugh that broke off in a gulp, "I suppose I should sit at home with the blinds pulled down, and put off all my appointments. I mean it literally. At this moment I do not know where under heaven she can be."

Judith knew neither what to say nor what to think. Then he flushed up and said: "You must not fancy she has gone off with anybody; it is not that. She has simply left me."

"Left you? What can have induced her?"

"You may well ask. I suppose you will conclude, as the world certainly will, that I must have used her abominably, but—" He paused an instant, drawing one or two hard breaths, and twisting the corner of the sofa cushion into a knot. "But—I loved her."

Judith looked at him. "I shall not think it," she said. "But you must have quarrelled?"

"Can one call it a quarrel? A little tiff, I should have said. One morning—years ago it seems; it must have been Tuesday—I came in, in a bad temper I dare say, and laughed at some songs she was trying over, and told her they did not suit her. She took it up rather warmly, and later she was still vexed and would not make it up. I was out most of the day and all the evening, and when I came in she was gone. Since then I have had a letter with no address on it, to tell me that she felt herself crushed and manacled; she wanted to lead her own life and develop her own soul.—What does it all mean?"

Lady Gilderdale began to see something of what it meant; she recognised the phrases, and knew from whose mint they came. She remembered perfectly that her cousin, Portia Temple-Smith, had taken up little Mrs. Redway. She recalled the pretty, shallow face, the silvery cold voice, and fancied she could see what had been happening. It was difficult to know what to say.

"I know what you must naturally be imagining about me," he went on uneasily, still wrenching the unfortunate cushion, "and one hates to protest about oneself; but I do want you to know that on my side I haven't given her any cause—it is not the usual thing at all. In truth, ever since I have loved Em I have been all hers, and she knows it. She has nothing of that sort to reproach me with. I sometimes fancy that if I had treated her as many fellows treat their wives, she would have thought more of me. She has had her own way in everything."

Lady Gilderdale smiled. "Don't repent of being too good," she said. "But if you love her, believe me, it is bound to come right. You must have patience for a little, and give her time to come to her senses."

"Oh, I cannot. And besides she has taken my little Betty."

"Your little girl? I did not know you had any children."

"Only that one. She is such a forward monkey, and the drollest, dearest little person!"

"I think if she has the little one with her you may be happier about her: the child will keep her safe."

"Ah, if she cared for her, but she doesn't. I think she only took her to spite me. Oh!" he cried, breaking off suddenly while his forehead contracted as if with physical pain, "to love and hate the same person at the same moment—it tears one to pieces."

"It sounds cruel to preach patience, but I should wait. Silence before grievous things is sometimes the only wisdom."

"If I could only see her and know what she is doing. She always hankered to go on the stage. If she does that, what is to become of the poor baby? Besides"—with a sudden change of tone—"I won't submit to it; I can't."

After a reflecting pause Lady Gilderdale spoke again: "I think I may possibly be able to help you. You know Mrs. Temple-Smith, who is a cousin of Sir Hervey's, was a great friend of your wife's; it is just possible she may be able to throw some light on it. Will you leave it to me for a day or two, unless you should chance on some clue?"

He looked at her with all his heart in his eyes. "I can't begin to thank you," he said, "nor for all your goodness to me this morning."

"Don't; there is no need. I feel sure it is only a misunderstanding, and it will all come right."

He rose with something like his own alertness. "I will be going now."

"Will you let me order the carriage to take you back, or would you rather go through the wood? That would be shorter and much less tiring. I will give you the key of the gate."

"Oh, the wood, please. I would rather walk." He felt he could recover his calmness and self-command in the grave silent dimness; it was like her to think of it.

"I want you to promise me one thing," she said as she held his hand in farewell; "that when you get home you will take food and rest. Lie down and keep resolutely still whether you can sleep or not. Never mind your afternoon engagements: better sacrifice them than incur an illness; and if you go on like this you will risk a complete breakdown of nerve which would be fatal."

He promised gratefully. Already she had made a new man of him; he no longer thought wistfully of those gray crawling waves.

When he was gone, Judith stood a minute by the sofa, putting the tumbled pillows straight, and she sighed.

"If I were dead or had come to grief, there would be no such bitter tears shed for me. I think it is generally the cold and unresponsive women on whom men lavish all their hearts."

And then she thought of some lines from an Irish love-song which she had come across in a translation.

She is my treasure, O, she is my treasure; the woman with the gray eyes . . . a woman who would not lay a hand under my head.
She is my love, O, she is my secret love; a woman who tells me nothing . . . a woman who does not remember me.
She is my choice, O, she is my choice; the woman who would not look back at me, the woman who would not make peace with me.
She is my desire, O, she is my desire; a woman dearest to me under the sun, a woman who would not pay heed to me if I were to sit by her side.
It is she who has ruined my heart and left a sigh forever in me.

. . . . . .

"Does she deserve it all, I wonder?" said Judith.

For her the wine of life had never been poured out, and unlike most women who have lacked that wine, she knew it: for she was of those who understand.

All her life she had been in love with Love: in her long-past girlhood, when she had fancied vainly that Heaven's choicest gift had come to her, and still in her chill solitude, she believed in the beauty and potency of that strange force which is the fount of all the poetry, all the music, all the fervency and glow of this earthly life of ours, though to her it must always be an ideal distant thing, pure as the snow on the mountain tops, and as remote.

XXI.

A TELEGRAM was brought to Lady Gilderdale next morning while she and Miss Fane were still lingering over the breakfast-table. Sir Hervey, though better, was not yet down-stairs. Judith looked at it with some curiosity when she saw the name. "Sorry unable to sing Thursday. E. Redway," it ran. "Ah," she said to herself, "handed in at Young Street, Kensington: that Fosbury letter was a blind. I thought so. Shall I send and let him know? It is certainly a clue, and it will probably turn out that she is with Portia. On the whole I think it would be best if I could see Portia myself first."

"Anything wrong about the party?" asked Clemency, watching her. "A wire nearly always means mischief."

"Only that Mrs. Redway can't sing. I think her place can easily be supplied."

"Mrs. Redway! Why to be sure! I heard the most extraordinary story about her in Pinecliff yesterday, and if it is true she certainly couldn't. I wonder I forgot to tell you; only going on to the Digbys and finding Frank and Rhoda just back from India put it all out of my head. Do you know they say she has bolted with Valentine Garcia. Do you believe it can be true?"

"No, certainly. Mr. Redway was here yesterday; he never got my note to put him off. He told me she

was away from home, and I rather think there has been a quarrel, but I don't believe Mr. Garcia has anything to do with it. Stories in Pinecliff always gather like snowballs."

"Let us look at the telegram. Well, she has not gone far at any rate. If she had levanted I don't think she would have had the cheek to wire. It is a nuisance anyway. I am afraid it will spoil the party, because if it is such a cataclysm he would not be able to play either, and I should hate to have another man foisted into the trios now."

Judith took the telegram up-stairs to Sir Hervey.

"Mr. Redway told me yesterday his wife was away," she said; "but it seemed uncertain whether she might be back by Thursday, so I took no steps about a substitute; I think we may safely leave it to him."

"H'm. I am not at all sure that I shall not take the whole matter out of his hands. Chadwin has been retailing some Pinecliff gossip. I should not wish to have people to the house about whom there was any scandal."

"I don't believe there is. Clemency had heard something of the kind yesterday, but I am convinced it was mere baseless rumour."

"Well, Chadwin had heard that he treats her so abominably that she was forced to take flight one night with her little girl."

Judith faced round; she was standing by the window. "Oh, Hervey, you could know him and believe that?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Know him? What does one really know of these people after all?"

"He was here yesterday, you know," she went on. "He told me Mrs. Redway was away, and I gathered that there had been some serious misunderstanding. It is quite possible he may wish to withdraw from this affair of ours—he is so worried; but if not, I think it would be cruel to prejudge the matter against him."

"Well," said Sir Hervey irritably, "it is most annoying that it should have happened just now. A week later it would not have signified. I should dislike extremely having to engage a new man whose style might be totally different. I suppose it had better go on."

Judith had been far too much concerned for the crushing sorrow she had witnessed to have had a thought as to whether he would be able to play for them or not. It struck her with a strange surprise that to Sir Hervey and to Clemency both, the broken heart, the ruined home seemed only of consequence as they affected the success of the party.

"Do you think that, as you are so much better, you could spare me to-day?" she asked presently. "I want to run up to town for a few hours. My dress ought to be tried on again, and I want to see Portia Temple-Smith."

"Saturday, my dear! I don't see how you could get to your dressmaker before two o'clock. Besides, I feel inclined for a little music presently when I come down, and I shall want you to play for me."

"Oh, I quite forgot it was Saturday. I will write and make an appointment with Madame Brion for Monday then. Of course I shall be so pleased to play for you."

"I should be sorry, Judith," he said, "to have you

enter into any great intimacy with Portia. Of course when she was down here we were bound to show her some little civility. She is my second cousin, and she has had a cruel life, poor woman! Her husband was a scoundrel, and a mean hound to boot, and when she was compelled to leave him, one felt that one must show that she had the support of her own family; but I dislike exceedingly the line she has taken up. To rush before the public in the way she has done is the last thing for a woman in her unfortunate position. I should be disgusted if you were to be drawn into any of her schemes."

She smiled. "You need not be afraid. I detest them quite as much as you do."

Judith tried to lay the matter aside, but Redway was hardly out of her mind all Sunday; she had adopted his trouble with a pitying, anxious concern, and she was glad when, her business with the dressmaker concluded, she found herself in a hansom, driving to Mrs. Temple-Smith's flat on Campden Hill. Fortune favoured her: Portia was at home, a thing that rarely happened.

"What, you?" she cried when she saw who her visitor was. "Wonders will never cease! Fancy you travelling about in this way by yourself!"

"I thought I might count upon you for some lunch," said Judith, kissing her. "I came up to have my gown fitted, and to see about some things I want for Thursday: you know Hervey and I are going to perpetrate a party—a thing we haven't done for years."

"You don't say so! And you are becoming so mundane as actually to come up to town to be fitted. I always thought your clothes grew on you."

Judith laughed. It was true she did not trouble her head much about what she wore, but was usually as satisfactorily arrayed as people who spend all their thoughts and more than all their money upon it.

"We have had one disappointment about our arrangements," she said presently. "We were counting upon your little singing-mistress, Mrs. Redway, for three songs, and I had a wire from her on Saturday to say she must fail us. As it was sent from this part of town, you can probably tell me where she is. I know you were interested in her. I want to see her this afternoon."

Mrs. Temple-Smith looked at her. "Now I wonder how much you know," she said.

"Is there anything to know?"

"My dear, you look very innocent, but I suspect you of wanting to return my singing bird to her cage. No, I won't give you her address unless you will promise me it shall not get known in Pinecliff."

"I certainly shall not make any such promise. Portia, if you are trying to hide Mrs. Redway from her husband, you are doing a very mischievous and a very dangerous thing. You might get into an exceedingly awkward scrape yourself. Besides, how silly it is: you must know perfectly well how quickly he could trace her if he chose to employ detectives."

"That may be; but the poor child confides in me. I shall not give her address to you or to any one without her sanction."

"Very well; then there is no more to be said. It is something at least to know that you are responsible for her."

"Responsible!" cried Portia uneasily, "I am noth-

ing of the kind. I had nothing to do with her leaving home. In fact, I don't in the least want her here just now. I have Gage Orman, who is a far more efficient secretary. I may find her a little work to do for me occasionally, but really she is rather a care than otherwise. I am sorry for her, that is all."

"Gage Orman!" repeated Judith. "Poor Gage! I should think that story would have given you enough of meddling."

Portia flushed angrily. "I have been her only friend," she said.

"Well, we will not talk of her; it is too tragic. One thing I suppose you may tell me without a breach of confidence: what cause does Mrs. Redway think she had for leaving her husband in this way? Has he behaved ill to her? When one knows half the story, it is but fair that her half should be told."

"Oh, she brings no specific charges, but I can see how she has been tyrannised over and bullied—made into a mere domestic drudge, and refused all openings for self-expression, for self-culture. Her individuality was being stifled."

Lady Gilderdale's face took on a slightly scornful expression. "My dear Portia," she said, "you used to despise shams and conventions. I really think the new ones are worse than the old, which at least could stand a good deal of wear and tear. I am sick of the cant about a woman's individuality. If she can't develop her own character in the same house with her husband and child, I don't think there can be much to develop."

"Oh, Judith," cried Portia impatiently, rising and standing by the mantelpiece, "you don't understand

the question, or rather you will not understand. You sit there on your pedestal, in the midst of your serene, happy life, and you draw your mantle of old-world prejudice round you, and you will not admit that any one has a right to be less happy than you. The old conditions suit you; so no one has any business to change them."

"So that is your idea of my outlook. If I fail to grasp your point of view, you no less fail to grasp mine. Do you think I do not feel for a woman on whom the bitter sorrow of an unhappy marriage has been laid? It is because I do, that I think it hardly short of wicked to encourage one who has every chance of happiness, with a husband devoted to her, to wreck it all simply because she cannot have her own way in everything."

"Devoted!" repeated Mrs. Temple-Smith scornfully. "One has learnt the value to put upon that sort of devotion—a selfish fondness for whatever ministers to his own comfort. He is probably equally devoted to his pipe."

"I don't say there may not have been faults on both sides; there most likely have been: faults of temper, of egotism—two very self-asserting personalities are apt to clash; but there does not seem to have been the smallest occasion for a breach, and I tell you plainly, Portia, that if you had not put your notions into a very silly, ill-balanced little head, I don't believe she would ever have dreamed of leaving her home."

"My notions, as you call them, will be the emancipation of thousands. If a few women had the courage to act as my little protégée is acting, to raise the stand-

ard of independence, the world would be a happier place for women. Men must be taught that marriage is an equal partnership; the day has gone by when wives were to be made chattels or playthings of."

"My dear Portia, very few wives to-day are either chattels or playthings, unless they wish to be. But all this is beside the mark. I really do not see what Mr. Redway has done that you should abet his wife in such an outrageous act."

"I tell you the child was miserable. Men are all alike."

"Another of your cant phrases. Even dogs are not all alike."

And then Gage Orman came in, and the conversation was changed. If Mrs. Temple-Smith could have prevented it, she would not have let Lady Gilderdale meet her new secretary. Miss Orman's lamentable story had been well known, and Portia was afraid lest the strict notions of her cousin would make her visit Gage's sins upon her head in the way that society women so well understand how to do; but the gentle courtesy and consideration of Judith's manner left nothing to be desired. She did not talk much to Miss Orman—they had little in common; but her attitude to a social outcast was prompted by the thought: "Perhaps if one knew all the story one would feel she was more to be pitied than blamed."

After transacting the remainder of her business, Judith returned to the flat to wait till it should be time for her train. Mrs. Temple-Smith had gone out, and so had Miss Orman, and she sat down in the drawing-room with a magazine, wondering, as she listlessly turned the pages, whether she had really done much

good by coming. On the whole she thought it had been worth while; she had at least ascertained that the runaway was under her cousin's wing, such as it was.

Presently the door opened abruptly, and some one came in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried a clear voice. "I thought Mrs. Temple-Smith was in—" And then the speaker broke off suddenly, for she saw who it was that was sitting near the window.

Lady Gilderdale came forward and took her hand before she had time to make her escape.

"Ah, Mrs. Redway," she said, "you are just the person I wanted to see. Please come and sit down. I think my cousin will be in soon."

Emmie tried to say she could not wait, but a certain gentle compulsion drew her against her will to the sofa.

"I had your telegram," resumed Lady Gilderdale, "and I should have called on you this afternoon, but my cousin seemed to fancy you wished your address kept secret. Is that so?"

"I am very sorry to inconvenience you," said Emmie, speaking hurriedly and in a manner very unlike her usual assurance. "I fancied that as I had given you nearly a week's notice there would be plenty of time to fill my place. I shall not be in Pinecliff at present; it is impossible I could undertake it."

"My dear Mrs. Redway, it is a matter of very little consequence who sings at our concert. Sir Hervey will have no difficulty in engaging another soprano. It is about your own affairs I wished to speak to you. I think you ought to be aware, if you are not, what

very serious reports your sudden departure has given rise to."

Emmie gave her head a little toss. "Oh, I don't care what people say. Evil-minded people will think evil, I suppose. Pioneers in a good cause must expect to have mud thrown at them."

Judith was tempted to ask what cause she imagined herself to be pioneering, but she refrained, and simply said:

"You have no right to be indifferent to what is said of you: a married woman's reputation belongs to her husband. Moreover, it is not only of you that evil tongues make suggestions. People fancy that you must have been very ill-used to have taken such a step."

"Ill-used!" Emmie gave a little hard laugh. "Oh, he did not beat me nor starve me; but I had my reasons, good and sufficient ones as they appear to me, for leaving home; but you must excuse me, Lady Gilderdale, if I decline to give account of myself to a stranger."

Judith bowed silently, and sat for a few minutes gazing into the fire, while Mrs. Redway fidgeted with her gloves. Then she spoke again:

"Personally I have no curiosity to learn your address, but I do urge upon you to write to your husband, who has been seeking you for many days in great anxiety."

"Shall you tell him you have seen me?"

"Certainly I shall. I need not remind you that he would have no difficulty in tracing you if he chose, and I don't see how you are to obtain work, which my cousin tells me you want, if you keep your where-

abouts a secret. Your wisest plan will be to let him have the interview he wishes, and discuss your difference reasonably, instead of persisting in this childish game of hide-and-seek."

"You have seen him since I came away, then?" said Em, her tone betraying a certain curiosity. "Did he ask you to see me?"

"Oh, no. But I have seen him, yes."

"How—how did he seem to take it?" inquired Emmie, twisting the fingers of the glove she had taken off.

Judith looked at her with her large, serious gaze. "Do you think that is quite a question you should ask an outsider?" she said, and Emmie crimsoned. Then she took out her pocket-book, and stooped her head over it while she scribbled an address. "That is where I am staying," she said, "if you choose to give it to him. I don't mean to write, but I will not refuse to see him if he comes up. It will be no good, though."

Judith took it. "I must go now," she said, "or I shall miss my train. There are many things I should like to say to you, but perhaps after all it is better not."

. . . . . .

Redway was turning out of Linden Avenue, the little side road where he lived, with his hat slouched down and the collar of his coat turned up to his ears —for it was blowing up squally. The wind came in sudden gusts round corners and swept up each opening from the sea, laden with a drifting something, too fine for rain, too wet for mist. He was just crossing the wide road which led to the station when a car-

riage, coming rapidly down, was suddenly pulled up, and turning he saw a sweet, gracious face bending forward to catch his eye, and a kind hand stretched out.

"It is you! I thought I could not be mistaken. I was just going to leave a message at your house. I have some news for you. Get in and I can tell you all about it. Where would you like to be put down?"

"Anywhere on the road to Eastern Green, thanks. I am on my way to St. Martin's Hall for a practice of the East Pinecliff Orchestral Union."

"Oh, I must pass that on my way home. St. Martin's Hall, tell Simpson"—to the footman who was holding the carriage door open.

It seemed a haven after the blustering night—so warm, so sheltered, with the softness of the opossum rug and the delicate, elusive fragrance of violets and Russia leather. And those kind gray eyes! They would not have looked at him so sweetly, so hopefully, if she had not some comfort to give him. She was rummaging in a little bag.

"First of all I must give you this."

"She held out the card, and as he bent forward to read it by the light of a lamp they were passing, he saw the address pencilled in his wife's own writing. He turned round with an eager question which she answered before it was spoken.

"Yes, I saw her this afternoon at my cousin's flat; she is not staying there, but she has rooms near, and she came in."

He put up his hand to his head. "I want to ask everything at once," he said.

"Let me tell you exactly what she said: 'You may

give him the address if you choose, and I won't refuse to see him if he comes up, but it will be no good.'"

"No good! What did she mean? What reason did she give?"

"None, to me. But at least she admits that you had given her no justification—as the world would count justification."

"Tell me that you don't think I have."

"Truly I don't believe you have," she said; "but Mrs. Redway made no confidences; I have not heard her side, except through Mrs, Temple-Smith."

"For Heaven's sake, tell me what she said."

"I wonder if it is wise. You know the old warning about putting your hand between the bark and the tree. I have found your wife; she has promised to see you: I think you must deal with it alone now."

"But I am all in the dark; I shall blunder horribly. Sometimes I feel so furious that I dare hardly trust myself to see her, and then again I want her so that I know I shall cringe."

"You must not do that," said Judith. "If you ever mean to be master, you must now." She smiled a little to herself in the dark. "Am I a traitor to my sex to say that to you, I wonder? There is a certain type of woman who never values what she holds on too secure a tenure. It is well for her that you love her as you do; but your love must command, not beseech."

"And yet she says I bullied her."

"Yes, I know; and Mrs. Temple-Smith thinks you do, and pities her. I can see there has been a deep-reaching misunderstanding between you, and for that you must take your share of blame."

"I believe I have been an ill-tempered brute lately; yet in the main I was right. You don't think I ought to have let her go off with the Montana-Carson Company, do you? I don't mean to make terms with her about that."

"You are right. No, I did not intend to criticise any particular decision of yours. You are probably the best judge of those matters. What I meant to hint was more this: Have you given her room? Have you recognized that she too has a very marked individuality of her own? Haven't you perhaps treated her too much in the 'master in my own house' kind of spirit?"

"I don't know. I only know that I have loved her."

"Yes, but even love may be oppressive sometimes, especially if the recipient does not fully respond. Perhaps you thought your wooing was finished when you put your ring on her hand. With many people that is only the beginning. Ah, here we are at the hall," as the carriage stopped.

He took her hand: "It seems so feeble to say Thank you! What can one say for such goodness as you have shown me?" he said.

He knew as well as if she had admitted it, that her business in town was a mere nothing; that it was pure pity that had taken her that long journey on that bleak cold day, to try to set wrong right.

"One moment," she said; "I had almost forgotten: Sir Hervey wants to rehearse to-morrow, but you will wish to go to town. Shall I tell him Wednesday?"

"No; I will rehearse to-morrow if he likes. I won't

rush up in haste. I would rather write and say I am coming. To-morrow at three then."

"If you are sure the whole thing is not too much for you when you have this trouble on your mind. If you would rather not be worried with it, Sir Hervey could get somebody; he would write to Mr. Knowles."

She could see by the gas-lamp over the gate how his face darkened.

"I would get up out of my coffin and play for you sooner than he should have anything to do with it," he said.

He turned back once more just as the footman was shutting the carriage door.

"You didn't see Betty, I suppose?" he said wistfully.

XXII.

"So, Mrs. Redway, you intend to capitulate?"

The speaker was Gage Orman, and she was sitting in an unconventional attitude on the corner of the table at which Emmie was busy with a pile of cut flowers and a tray of vases. She was wearing a long paletot trimmed with Astrakhan, and a close Astrakhan toque which emphasised the blackness of her hair and the pallor of her face.

Emmie looked up from the chrysanthemum stalks she was snipping. "No, certainly not. What makes you say that?"

The visitor pointed to the flowers. "When anybody goes off to High Street station so early and comes back laden with flowers, and happens, quite by chance of course, to be expecting some one to see her in the afternoon, one perceives that two and two make four."

Emmie laughed as she shook out a spray of blossom. "Penetration goes too deep sometimes," she said. "These are not intended as a sort of votive offering, as you seem to imagine; they may have a meaning, but it is not that."

"May one know it?" Gage looked at Mrs. Redway with some degree of curiosity; she began to interest her.

"Simply that nothing goes farther to take off a lodging-housy and temporary kind of look than flow-

ers well arranged. I want to look settled, not as if I were camping for a night or two. You see I have unpacked my photos and things, and let Betty have her toys messing about."

"I see. You are very astute; nevertheless I prophesy that you will be back in Pinecliff by night-fall."

"I doubt it." Em went on with her task, setting golden against brown, and putting her head on one side to look at the effect. "I am not of the giving-in order."

"No; but if you don't, he probably will. What should you do if he offered to let you have your own way?"

"What should I do if the skies were to fall! No, you don't know my husband; he will give me anything under the sun I wish for—except my own way. And that happens to be the only thing I want."

"Well, Portia does not trust you. She sent you all kinds of messages to stand to your guns, and not let Mrs. Grundy, in the person of Lady Gilderdale, sway you as she did the other day."

"She did not!" cried Emmie rather angrily. "She merely represented the common-sense view that I shall have to see Mr. Redway sooner or later to come to an understanding about money-matters and the child; and it might just as well be sooner. I did not allow her to discuss my position or offer me any advice, I can tell you. I don't know what made her want to mix herself up in it, I am sure. It is certainly no business of hers."

"Opposition to poor dear Portia, I have no doubt. If ever there was a martyr to her convictions, it is

Portia Temple-Smith. The things she has had said of her!"

The speaker at any rate had been a martyr to hers, and Emmie, who knew her story in a vague, partial way, wondered for an instant whether she had found the game worth the candle.

"I suppose we must all expect to have stones thrown at us, and our motives misunderstood," she said in the glib catchword phrases she had so quickly picked up. "It is the lot of every one who sets herself to right a wrong."

"To right the wrong!" Gage walked to the window, then came back with a strange gleam in her narrowed eyes. "Are you so simple as to suppose we shall ever do that? We are flinging ourselves against convention, tradition, precedent, and breaking them all down one after another. But don't you see that after all, behind them, we are flinging ourselves against a rock? We ought to rebel against the cruel power that made us women."

Emmie looked at her, startled, but half comprehending.

"You," she said, "to despair of the cause! You whom Mrs. Temple-Smith calls her henchman. But surely we are winning all along the line. Look at the position of women now, compared with what it was when our mothers were young, the careers open to us, the— But it is absurd to say all this to you."

"Of course. I know it all better than you do. And at the end we are women still. Did you ever hear my history? I came up to London very young, to work as a journalist. Oh, I was emancipated if you like! I never was shackled by any society conven-

tions. But in these days if you snap yours fingers in the face of society, it will open its arms to you. I did as I liked, I went where I liked, I had a rattling good time. I might have married over and over again, but I was not going to put my neck under the yoke. And then we had a new editor, a man they said who could make things spin. So he could. He was not young; he was awfully ugly—I wonder why it is one always cares so much more for ugly men! He—well, he did not offer to marry me; he had the same ideas I had always had as to there being no need for outside fetters when— But then he loved as men love, and I—like a woman. We went abroad for several months, and then he began to hint at making a change. I had never before met a man I could not hold, fascinate, for as long as I pleased; but then I loved him, and it seemed to paralyse me. Well, to cut a long story short, one morning he was gone. He had left a letter and plenty of money, and I came back to Portia Temple-Smith. There was nothing to be done, you see."

"Ah," said Emmie; "it is a mistake to care too much. If you had been wise—"

"Exactly; if I had been wise. Well, Mrs. Redway, take my advice, and keep your indifference as long as you can. It is the only armour for a woman to trust to. Good-bye. I wish you well through your interview."

"Oh, must you go? Can't you stay and have lunch with me?"

"Not unless you particularly want a third party to back you up. Mr. Redway would be ready to throw me out of the window, I should think."

"Oh, he isn't coming to lunch; he wouldn't. So silly of him! I am so sorry you won't stay."

And she was, genuinely; for she felt nervous about the coming interview, especially by and by, when the lunch was cleared away, and she found herself as it were "sitting up for company." It seemed so ridiculous to be expecting one's husband to call like a visitor. When presently the maid opened the door and announced "Mr. Redway," for a moment her heart was in her mouth. Would he rush in and overbear her defences with his impetuosity, as he had so often done after their differences? No: he was following the servant very slowly, and when he entered the room, holding his hat and gloves, he certainly fulfilled the rôle of afternoon caller. He came forward without offering to touch her or take her hand, and paused near her, resting his hand on the back of a chair.

"Won't you sit down?" she said feebly, checking an hysterical inclination to giggle.

He took no notice of the proffered chair, but began, as soon as the door was shut, speaking very quietly:

"I want to understand what you mean by leaving my house in the way you did. You must surely have some reason that I cannot guess, for what you have done. For Heaven's sake speak openly: tell me what you charge me with. Keep nothing back."

"I have explained already: you had my letter?"

"Your letter? I simply cannot understand it. I don't know what it means."

"It means that I am pent up, stifled. I want room to breathe, to live my own life, which you will never let me have."

"Surely you had liberty enough. You had your own work, your own money. What can any woman want more?"

"You oppress me; you turn me into a mere shadow, a mere echo of yourself. I am sick of being somebody else's shadow. I want to live, live, live!" She stamped her foot upon the floor at each repetition.

"You must be mad, I think," he said.

"I must have been mad when I tied myself down to a miserable little narrow life in a miserable little narrow place like Pinecliff."

He looked at her. "And you outrage my home and my love because you find Pinecliff dull. Good God!"

There was a moment's dead silence, and Em, who was standing by the mantelpiece, stole a glance at him. A strange feeling came over her that this was not the same man at whose side she had lived for more than two years, whom she had flouted and teased, and whose caresses she had despised. Was it ten days ago, or ten years, that his hand had taken her by the chin and tried to turn her face to him for his kiss, and she had struck him? She felt suddenly afraid of him, and her fear took refuge in flippancy.

"Isn't it rather absurd," she asked, "that two people who bore each other to extinction, cannot agree amicably to go each their own way without a scandal? You asked me just now to tell you candidly what fault I found with you. Well, the fault, I'll admit, is probably my own, but the fact remains: I am deadly tired of you."

Did the wife of Heber the Kenite wear that smile

upon her face when she drove the nail well home into the temple of the man who had trusted her?

Roger did not wince, only his lips went very white. Presently he spoke:

"Have you forgotten the vows you made to me when we stood together before God's altar?"

"Oh, but that is only an antiquated form; besides, I wasn't attending. I am sure I never promised to give up all my own individuality."

"I suppose you know that I can compel you to return if I choose."

"I doubt extremely whether you can do anything of the kind. You can go to law, I know, and get an order, but I am pretty sure you cannot enforce it in these days."

"Well, it is of no consequence, since I do not intend to take you back."

Em looked at him, her eyes growing round. She had been prepared for storming, for passionate appeals to her pity, but this daunted her.

"I wish to know how you mean to live and what you mean to do," he went on in the same cold hard voice: "for as long as you bear my name and do nothing to break the legal tie between us, I am responsible for you."

Em felt that the walls of her self-chosen prison were closing upon her. A wild impulse came over her to cry out that she only wanted a little freedom, a brief experiment, not to be so taken at her word; and then she looked at his face, set like a mask, and knew it was too late. She wanted to scream, but she was paralysed. In a moment she regained command of herself and said:

"Oh, as to name, I mean to resume my old professional name of Rose Alba. I shall give singing lessons, and possibly later on join some operatic company. I suppose there will be no difficulty about my having the use of my own money?"

"None whatever."

"I shall of course depend entirely on myself."

"Very well; but if you find yourself in any pecuniary difficulty you had better let me know."

He took out his watch. "Will you ring for Betty, please? I must be gone in five minutes. I must not miss the express, for I have to play at Tristerwood to-night."

That was the hardest moment of all to him. Pride and resentment had kept him cold and strong through all the bitter interview, but Betty's pleased crowings and laughings, the feeling of her little soft fingers at his neck, went far to break him down. He carried her to the window and hugged her close. Em watched them, and a spasm of jealousy shot across her mind. She poked the fire viciously. Presently she looked round.

"If you feel so strongly about Betty, you had better keep her. I don't want her, I'm sure; she is a dreadful nuisance in lodgings."

"I cannot take her now. I don't intend to keep Ellen, and there will be no one to do for her. While she is such a baby she had better stay with you. Later on I shall certainly have her."

He had another reason: he remembered what Lady Gilderdale had said—"The child will keep her safe." While Betty was with her he felt that Em was not wholly cut adrift.

"Look here," he said, "if you let any harm come to her, or let her grow up hating me, may God judge you for it!"

He loosened the baby's clinging fingers and set her on the sofa, and ran down the stairs, trying not to hear the wail she sent up after him.

Half an hour later Mrs. Temple-Smith came in. Emmie was walking restlessly about the room with very pink cheeks.

"So you really have not vanished, as I more than half expected," cried the visitor. "Good child! Well done!" and she patted her on the shoulder.

"Oh, the enemy is completetly routed," said Emmie with a little unsteady laugh. "I am free to pursue my own road without molestation. He really was wonderfully reasonable—more so than I expected."

"Well, let us celebrate victory by a little dinner somewhere, and Ibsen at the Independent afterwards. That would be appropriate, don't you think?"

"By all means; the very thing. I own I feel a little unsettled. Oh, do you know I offered Betty as a compromise, and he would not have her."

"I am not surprised. No doubt he will rejoice in a little bachelor freedom too."

"Oh, I don't know that it was altogether that." A vision came across her of Roger's face when he raised it from bidding good-bye to the child, but she stifled the remembrance. "Well, I feel inclined for some fun to-night; I'll go and get my things on."

She ran up-stairs, laughing, and singing snatches from the "Geisha."

XXIII.

THE music-room at Tristerwood had for that evening quite parted with its chapel-like character; filled with radiant colour, with soft light, with the hum of well-bred voices, its charm was of quite a different kind. The masses of chrysanthemums, the tall palms which filled every corner made an exquisite background for the dresses, the jewels, the fair faces, which crowded the long room, and the myriads of wax-lights in silver sconces against the wall lent a mellow light, which made every woman look her best. "For Heaven's sake, no electric light!" Sir Hervey had said. "To say nothing of the martyrdom to one's eyes, one does not wish to count every grain of powder on a woman's nose." So the antique silver branches which had lighted up Gilderdale festivities in the days of Queen Anne were once more brought into requisition.

"How beautiful Judith Gilderdale is looking to-night!" remarked an old friend, putting up a pair of long-handled eye-glasses to watch her as she moved slowly down the room to greet a new arrival, stately in white brocade cut in an antique fashion, with diamonds on her neck and in her hair. "What a marvellous recovery it has been. I never thought to see her take her place in the world again."

"And how young she looks!" responded the lady

addressed, "with her slender figure and her fair skin, in spite of the white hair."

"Ah, well, she is but thirty-seven after all, and that is the prime with many Englishwomen."

"And those placid women wear well, because they take nothing to heart. Happy for her to have that temperament with such a terrible affliction. Those diamonds on the white hair make me think of the glitter of a snow-drift. She puts one in mind of the Snow Queen, so immovable, so cold."

The last words were audible to the violinist, who stood by the curve of the grand piano, taking his instrument from its case: for the quartet was about to begin. A smile touched the gravity of his face for an instant. He at least knew better.

He had noted with what gracious tact she had mentioned and apologised for the absence of the soprano, to one or another where she fancied gossip and speculation might have taken root. "Yes, they were disappointed not to have the Berçeuse with violin obligato—it was always so popular; but Mrs. Redway was in town just now, and could not manage to run down for it as she had hoped to persuade her. She saw her on Monday at Mrs. Temple-Smith's. So Major Abbott was going to give them some Schubert instead." And so on, smoothing the way for Emmie's return. But he knew Judith's kindness was all in vain.

His first solo was a prelude and fugue of Bach's, a very brilliant chromatic one—Sir Hervey's choice. It was magnificently played, but it did not take the audience.

"Do you like Redway's playing?" said some one doubtfully, to his neighbour.

"Oh, it is the sort of thing one is bound to like, isn't it? It is wonderful to get such a full rich tone in those rapid passages. Gilderdale is an excellent judge; he thinks a great deal of him. He certainly has very fine qualities."

"I see he is down for that lovely Schumann thing. How seldom people know what suits them!"

That did not come till the end of the evening. Clemency Fane's rendering of Saint Saën's Rondo Capriccioso was much more warmly applauded than the professional solo had been, not only because she was a woman and one of themselves, but because the music appealed far more to the sensuous taste of the half-musical audience than the intellectual severity of Bach.

Presently there was a lull in the talk, and heads were turned towards the platform again with polite attention. And then, as the long wailing notes stole out, it seemed as though a hand were laid on each one of the crowd, and every man was for a moment brought face to face with the secret of his own soul —with long-buried sorrow, with joy that would never come again, with unsatisfied longings, with hopes that would never find their earthly close; with all the pathos and mystery of life, and the despair of it. Some hung on every note, some kept their heads bent down, looking at their programmes because their eyes were wet. When it ceased, there was for an instant that hush that is a tribute better than any applause; then the inevitable stupid clamour broke out, and when the violinist reappeared in the doorway through which he had just vanished, to bow his acknowledgments, there was a demand for an encore. The obtuse

public, roused to a rare sensation, wanted to experience it again, ignorant of the fact that those moments cannot be repeated.

Once more he bowed and went, and Lady Gilderdale, who had been playing the accompaniment, after a word to Major Abbott, followed him. He was standing by the window in the small library which opened out of the music-room, and had been kept for the performers. He looked round.

"Oh, I cannot play again," he said brusquely.

"You shall not. Stay here where it is quiet and cool. I have asked Major Abbott to sing something more; Miss Fane will play for him. For myself, I don't feel as if I could listen to anything else just yet."

He did not answer, and presently she added: "I do thank you very much for making the effort to play for us to-night. I am afraid we ought hardly to have asked it of you."

"I feel," he said after a minute, "as if I had been coining my heart's blood for the amusement of your guests. It is hardly decent."

He turned back to the window again and leaned upon the sill. It was a mild November night, very still and breathless, and the window stood wide open. The long sob of the surge, unbroken by any wuther of wind, rolled the whole length of the shore with its changeless rhythm. It was a very restful contrast to the hum of voices that rose and fell on the other side of the door.

It was characteristic of Judith that she asked him no question, deeply though she was interested in his trouble. She just stood quietly beside him, and her

silent compassion touched his senses like a perfume. He watched the far distant ruby light on the headland appear and vanish and appear again many times, before he spoke. At last he said:

"I saw her to-day."

"To-day?"

"Yes; she wired she had an engagement yesterday, so I went up for an hour this afternoon." Then after another long pause—"It is all over."

"What is over? Your quarrel?"

"Our married life. The whole thing."

"I did not try. I could not compel her to live with me if she will not. And then—I felt that I no longer wished to. She said things—oh, I can't tell you!"

"There is no need; it is better not. I am so deeply sorry for you both. But you must not give up hope."

"There is nothing left to hope for," he said. "You don't understand; it is utter disillusionment. I have lost my past as well as my present and my future. It was a phantom I have been squandering my heart on all this time, not her. I—oh, I have come to hate—" He stopped, and an expression that was not good to see crossed his face.

"Hush," said Judith, laying her cool hand on his. "Don't say it; don't let yourself think it. Try and believe that the one you loved was the real self that has somehow got obscured for a little."

"Oh, the horror of it!" he went on, speaking rapidly. "Thank God I have got back with clean hands. If I had let myself go one instant—" He pulled himself up. "I have no business to say these things to you. I forget myself; you have been too good to me."

"You hardly know what you say," she said piti-

fully. "You are new to suffering, and it seems intolerable; but it will not last. Those who have walked with sorrow know the infinite possibilities that lie beyond."

"There is no beyond to this."

"I know it must seem so. In the dark we can see nothing but our own pain; but the dawn will come. In God's hand there are healings that we do not dream of."

"It is no use to speak to me of God," he answered. "God has mocked me. I was straight, and then this comes to me."

The very boyishness of the words struck her with a sense of pathos. It was the elementary notion of the child or the savage that suffering is necessarily retribution. That there might be deeper purposes of discipline had not entered his mind.

Through the door behind her came the sound of the refrain of a song Major Abbott was singing—a song in fashion when he was young:

> **"For gold must be tried by fire,**
> **And the heart must be tried by pain."**

Judith noticed the curious appropriateness of the words, and wondered whether Redway did; but he had passed out of hearing of such things. In the "furnace of living pain" in which he was standing, the words of a hackneyed song could not penetrate. To him the mellow voice sounded no more distinct than the measured pulse of the sea.

Out of her bitter hard-won experience Judith would fain have reached him some of the medicines that had helped her, but she recognised the futility of outside

help, the solitude in which each soul must stand, and held her peace. His pain itself must teach him; nothing else could.

"I must go now. The song is ended, and the people will be beginning to take leave. Good-night. God help you!"

XXIV.

Spring was on her way, though not quite arrived; there were stirrings in the pinewoods, little rustlings of small creatures waking from their winter sleep and creeping out to look about them and form their plans for the good time that was coming; sharp green hooks of bracken thrust themselves up through last year's dead leaves, and in sheltered corners the wind-flowers peeped out. Already the blackbird began to tune his mellow throat, and the storm-cock was fluting to his love. But there was no spring in Roger's heart; it was all hard frozen.

Men take their troubles very differently from women; they don't nurse a sore heart and take it to church and district-visiting, and feed it on scraps of poetry, as the softer half of humanity is apt to do; they resent it, and try to stifle or distract it with whatever comes to hand. Roger tried work first, but that to some extent failed him: for he found himself with more leisure than he had had for years. It was inevitable that people should conclude that there must be something seriously amiss in a man whose wife could not live with him, and careful heads of schools and colleges, where the greater part of his work lay, informed him politely after Christmas that they had made other arrangements. A music-master's reputation is almost as delicate a thing as a doctor's, and the comment—"Oh, do you have Mr. Redway for your girls? Isn't

there something queer about him?" passed on its way like a rumour of scarlatina.

He did his best to amuse himself, to seek out the friends and pursuits of his bachelor days, but distractions wanted a much higher flavour now; things that used to seem the best fun in the world had become simply boring. There is nothing more impossible in this life than to go back. People began to look askance at him and say he was going to the dogs. But for his fiddle, most likely he would have gone there: but the music stayed him; he practised more than he had done for years.

It was one day in this early spring that he saw in the Pinecliff *Observer* an announcement that Sir Hervey and Lady Gilderdale had returned from the south of France where they had been wintering, and taken up their residence in Tristerwood. They had been abroad almost ever since the Tristerwood reception, and he had never seen Judith since that evening. How wonderfully sweet her compassion had been! but she was quite wrong about trouble doing one good. It was what good women always fancied, but it was quite the other way; he felt himself a worse man than he had been last year. How much he would like to see her again! but it was hardly likely he ever would, in the old way. Most likely by this time Sir Hervey would have taken up another hobby or another fiddler, and would not want him; and she—why, she had probably forgotten his very existence. He could be nothing to her, only she was so very pitiful.

He was about to give a concert, and wondered whether they would see his advertisement in the local paper and come to it. He ought to have sent Sir

Hervey a programme, only some odd feeling of shyness or pride withheld him.

They were there, however, sitting near the front with that curious air of aloofness that distinguished them both, and set them so apart from the general crowd. Redway did not look towards them, hardly seemed aware of their presence, but he was playing to them—to her.

"Judith," said Sir Hervey presently, "do you notice what a difference there is in Redway's playing since last year?"

"Yes I do, and it makes me rather unhappy."

"But it is an improvement."

"Yes, it is an improvement, I know; but it tells too much of the cost."

"Oh, I don't know that; he has been working, evidently, but I think it is less that than feeling. He always did get a wonderfully rich, full tone. He has a more supple arm and wrist than any man I know—unless it is Nachez; and no doubt he has been working that up; his bowing is at once so powerful and so delicate. But what I observed was more the increased perception and depth; you know I used to think him at times a little wanting there. I don't find any over-attention to technique."

"Ah, no; what I meant was that it made one sad. It used to be such happy, contented, joyous kind of playing. It gave one the bright sides of life, and passed over the dark places with nothing sadder than gravity. Now it is full of restlessness and strain."

"Too modern and morbid for your taste perhaps. Clemency would like it. Do you remember she used to say in her whimsical way that if Redway could get

his heart broken, his playing would be all the better for it. Who was it defined Music as 'flowers rooted in pain'?" he added dreamily. And then the next number began, and they were silent.

Looking round as they came out, Judith caught sight of the violinist coming down the corridor, and made Sir Hervey wait for him.

"What was that you played as an encore to the last thing?" she asked when the customary civilities about the concert and about their long absence abroad had been exchanged.

"That? Oh, that was an unpublished thing, written by a fellow."

"I thought so," she said; "but I had no idea you composed."

"Oh, I don't, in the orthodox way. I did not know I could at all till just lately. Sometimes a thing just comes as an improvisation, and I write it down. Did you like it?"

"Did I? I am not quite sure. It is very weird, and it takes hold of one; but it hurts."

"It was a very original theme," said Sir Hervey, "and very finely worked out, but you wanted a return to the first subject; it left off too raggedly. I have a very rare work on composition, by a Frenchman, which I should like to show you. When will you come over to Tristerwood?"

"I should like very much to come," he said, looking at Lady Gilderdale, and his hand clung a little to hers as she wished him good-night.

A very few days after he came, riding over on his bicycle one blustering March afternoon, tearing through the gathering dusk as if the fiends were after

him—as in truth he felt they were. He had got to one of the tangled places in life, where it seemed he could hardly win through. He felt the net of evil influences closing about him, and suddenly had come the remembrance that she who had helped him before, in his despair, was not out of reach. He did not want to ask for counsel or aid; in the present strait she could give him neither—only to take sanctuary in her presence.

There were visitors lingering after tea in the fire-lighted drawing-room, and he could exchange but a bare word with the hostess. He apologised for the lateness of his visit, and produced the pretext he had provided himself with, a prospectus of some subscription chamber-concerts which he wanted to set on foot—a project which was sure to win Sir Hervey's support. As soon as he had explained his scheme and discussed details a little, he rose to go. He had been a fool to come. What good could it do him to stand for just one moment in that atmosphere of purity and peace, when he must needs go out again into the dark to fight his difficulty as best he could? Just to look at that fair, gracious woman, who lived in a different world from his—what good could that do him?

But Sir Hervey would not hear of letting him go. He must stay and dine, and they would go over a trio of Raff's he had just got down. Dress? never mind that; they would be quite alone. No fiddle? Well, he should have the Strad., for once, out of the Italian cabinet. And then the carriage was announced to take the visitors home, and Sir Hervey escorted them to the hall.

Redway was standing beside the hearth, and as he looked down at Lady Gilderdale in her low chair, he met her serious gray eyes regarding him with a look of kindly interest, and suddenly he knew that he had not lost his friend: she was just the same as when he had seen her last.

"How have you been getting on?" she asked. "Come and sit here and tell me all about yourself."

"I am not getting on at all, from a material point of view," he said. "I have lost more than a third of my pupils. It seems rather absurd, but it appears that the existence of Mrs. Redway was a sort of patent of respectability, and I find myself a social pariah now."

"How cruelly unjust!" cried Judith.

"Yes, but upon my word I don't see how you can blame people; it is very natural. I can't go about proclaiming my innocence. After all, it has its good side: Do you remember warning me once that I was swamping the artist in the music-master? Well, I haven't the chance to do that now."

"But surely Mrs. Redway will come home soon? I hoped to have found that she was back already."

He shook his head. "That will not be," he said.

"Do you know," said Judith earnestly, "I believe you will find that she is heartily sick of her experiment by this time, and only longing to come back; but she is too proud to say so."

"Then she may take pride for her bedfellow."

He rose to his feet again, and stood leaning on the mantelpiece.

"Have you seen your little girl?" Judith asked after a momentary pause.

"Don't. I am trying to forget I ever had a little girl."

Lady Gilderdale rose too, and went and stood beside him.

"You are making a very great mistake if you are trying to do that," she said.

"I don't know. I am on the verge of making havoc of my life altogether, and if I do, there will be no place for Betty in it."

"But you will not. You will be true to your best self."

"Shall I? I wish I thought so. Somehow when one has been treated as I have been, it seems to give one a kind of license to be as bad as it is in one to be."

"But you don't want to. I can see that you are fighting against it."

"I suppose I am. Do you know I had a superstitious kind of feeling that if only I could get to you, you would help me somehow. I was fleeing from myself—or from the devil."

He did not apologise for using a word not usually spoken; he knew Judith was not the kind of woman whom plain words offend.

There was silence for a minute. Through the rents in the veil of conventionality Judith could see strange things, and she felt as though she were indeed struggling with the devil for this man's soul. Instinct rather than knowledge of the world told her something of the peril in which he stood, and she knew there were strong potentialities in him, for evil as for good. A sense of her own impotence—of the impotence of mere words—swept over her, and of the power she had by

simply being what she was, she took no count. And then Sir Hervey came back.

How could she help him? Yet how be deaf to his appeal? What could any human being do for another in such strait, still less one whom circumstances set so far off? Yet speech is not the only channel of influence, and while she grieved that she could do nothing, his resolve was drawing new strength: he was realising that he could never stand shamed in that presence; if he took that downward step he was being beckoned to, he would cut himself off for ever from her influence. He was very silent. The evening was spent in music, and all he had to say, he put into the notes.

When he was gone, she went up to her husband, who was gathering the loose sheets of music together.

"Hervey," she said, "I want you to be a little kind to Mr. Redway. He seems to have had a hard winter, and to have lost a good deal of work; people are visiting his wife's sins on him heavily."

"Ah, I remember there was some odd story about him just before we went away. What did he do?"

"Nothing; that is just the hard part of it. I met his wife at Portia's house soon after she went away, and she told me herself that she had no cause of complaint against her husband, except that she found him dictatorial. It seems Portia got hold of her, and stuffed her head with her wild notions of a woman's right to absolute independence, and Mrs. Redway, having an unfortunately logical mind, is carrying them out to the bitter end. I feel a little responsible, as it was I who mentioned her to Portia as a singing-mistress."

"What a fool he must be, not to insist on her going back!"

"You see the quarrel has deepened into an estrangement. You cannot wonder at his feeling a bitter resentment, for I believe he was very fond of her. I hope it may come right in the end, but meantime I think those who know the story should show that they think he ought not to be tabooed."

"That cousin of mine is the most mischievous woman I ever came across. She ought not to be at large. What are lunatic asylums for, I should like to know? Well, Judith, we can subscribe to these chamber-concerts of his, and we can have some more practices here, as we did last year, if you think it won't bore you. For my part I always enjoy music with professionals: they keep you up to the mark."

XXV.

THE Signorina Marta Ercolani, after a ten years' residence in England, still felt herself an exile and an alien. Nothing but her devotion to her Giannino, and her conviction that he was quite incapable of taking care of himself, would have kept her a week in so detestable a country. In sunny Pinecliff, she could not complain, as foreign visitors to England are so apt to do, that she never saw the face of the sky; but it was not the unclouded heavens, the glowing sunshine, the gray olives and blue sea, the vines and pomegranates that she hankered after; not the pictures nor the churches, not the old world, classic, romantic, mediæval, which Italy means to the traveller, for which she yearned; but rather for a certain narrow *calle*, into which the sun rarely penetrated, a meagre apartment, bare and scantily furnished, which to her meant home. The art treasures of Bologna, its ancient buildings, the departed glories of its University, were little or nothing to her; but her soul longed for a certain small modern church, whitewashed and gilded, where the Madonna was arrayed in much tinsel and imitation lace, and the altars were gay with bunches of artificial flowers. The severe dignity and beauty of the Catholic Cathedral at Pinecliff left her cold.

Still more she pined for the white-walled convent outside the town, with its prim ilex-shaded flowerless

garden, through whose long alleys she used to pace as a girl, and where she had thought her vocation lay. She was a good woman and not self-willed; she recognised the call of God in her home, and had faithfully tended her aged parents till their death. Then, when she was actually preparing for her long-delayed novitiate, home claims once more intervened; she had to go to her brother in his crushing bereavement, and she remained with him in the adopted country which would never be home to her.

Giovanni, who had come to England when little more than a boy, and had married an English wife, had got entirely acclimatised, but Marta had made the attempt too late in life. For Ercolani his own country had become impossible; he had been seriously involved in the struggles which preceded the setting up of "United Italy," and since he was on the losing side, had found himself proscribed. A musician carries his country with him, but Marta was no musician; she approved of music as something that interested her brother and took him out of his troubles; to her it meant little. She was a prim woman, with none of the typical Italian's grace and charm. Her black hair, which at nearly sixty showed no thread of gray, was brought rigidly down each side of her face, and kept in its place by bandoline which gave it a high polish, and she invariably wore a black alpaca apron and black silk mittens.

Redway, who had called late one afternoon in the hope of finding Ercolani, was rather dismayed to be shown in to the Signorina, who was sitting alone in the front parlour, occupied in the manufacture of worsted flowers of a variety unknown to botanists.

"My brother has not yet returned," she observed, in her formal exercise-book English, "but I expect him every moment. Pray be seated."

"So you have lost your inmate, Signorina," he said presently, when the weather had been disposed of. "You must find it rather lonely with John out so much."

The men in the orchestra who were at all intimate with Ercolani always called him John, for some reason best known to themselves.

"I am accustomed to solitude and have always useful occupations at hand. But yes; Miss Gaunt was a very acceptable inmate, and I miss her greatly. She had lived much in my dear country, and she liked my ways." She sighed.

"Do you think of letting your rooms again?" he asked tentatively.

She shook her head. "I think not. I shrink from strangers, and it really is not necessary: my wants and those of Giannino are very simple."

"I came really to ask John if he thought he could take me in. I am not quite a stranger, you see. Do you think you could consider it?"

The Signorina drew herself up. "We do not take gentlemen boarders," she said. "The case of Miss Gaunt was exceptional. She was known to my family in Bologna."

"Quite so. I see you would not like it. Excuse my having asked you." He rose to take leave, feeling more vexed and rebuffed than there was any occasion for, for the cold shoulder turned to him in many quarters had made him feel sore.

"Do I understand you are giving up your house?" she inquired.

"I have just put it into the agent's hands to let it furnished. One can usually get a tenant in Pinecliff, with all the coming and going. It is on my hands for more than half a year yet."

"You are not, then, expecting the return of Mrs. Redway and your little daughter this spring?" The Signorina looked at him severely as she put the question.

"I am not." He answered shortly and went out.

At the front door he encountered Ercolani, just letting himself in with his key.

"Why, Dodge, I haven't seen you for months. What have you been doing with yourself? Come in again. So glad I did not miss you!"

"I don't think I will, thanks. I have just been paying your sister a visit, and I don't expect she wants an encore. You are late."

"Yes, an extra practice. Knowles has got into one of his states of mind over this new Tchaikovsky symphony, and you know what that means. We have lost three men over it already."

Roger laughed. "It is a subject on which I mustn't make remarks," he said. He picked up his hat.

"No, no, I can't let you go off like this without a word. Come in here—" opening, as he spoke, the door of a little back room.

"Well, and how wags the world with you?" he went on, pushing round a big shabby armchair, and seating himself opposite.

Roger shrugged his shoulders. "It is not a very lively world just at present. I am thinking of trying

a new venture. Pinecliff seems to me to lack good chamber-music. I have a notion of running a set of subscription concerts. Do you think it would pay?"

"With Sir Hervey Gilderdale at your back, it may; but you know Knowles won't let it if he can hinder."

"I know it, and I fight at a disadvantage; but I must do something."

"You are right. I don't want to discourage you. I think you are spoiling for a fight."

Roger smiled rather grimly. "I feel inclined for one. I have been rather down on my luck this winter. I have made up my mind to chuck housekeeping and live in rooms."

Ercolani looked at him sorrowfully. "I am afraid that means—"

"Of course it does. The thing is at an end absolutely and for good. In one way I expect this new move of mine will make my position rather worse than it is at present, but I can't help that. The truth is, I cannot stand it any longer. I shall do something bad if I stay on in that horrible little house."

"Why not come to us? We have a spare room, you know."

"My dear John, I came to propose that very thing, but your good sister won't hear of it."

"Oh, nonsense! She has an idea, I dare say, that you might not like her Italian cookery or some of her fads. Never you mind Marta; it is my house, and I want you."

"It is awfully good of you, John; but I could not come and quarter myself where I felt I was unwelcome."

"You don't know Marta; she is a woman to whom

every new idea is unwelcome. She will be all right when she knows I wish it. Never was there so good a sister! You could board with us if you don't dislike our un-English ways, and have this little den to yourself for practising. Come, promise me you won't make any other arrangement till you hear from me again."

Nothing could have been better for Redway at this juncture than to find a corner in the Ercolani household. Naturally of a friendly and sociable disposition, he was for the moment almost without friends. The chasm that had opened between him and Knowles had cut away a good many of his former associates; in the early days of his marriage, he hardly missed them: he was too much taken up with his wife; and since his trouble he had been too proud, too sore, to bear any near approach. In spite of the way he had received Ercolani's sympathy at the time, it had borne fruit, and his feeling for him was more than mere liking; it was a very deep-rooted respect. There was a force and a repose about the elder man that made those who knew him rely on him, though amongst the generality of the men he might pass for a dull old fogy. There was something in common between his character and the instrument on which he played: no display, but a deep, true, reliable ground-bass upon which others could rest. Roger rested on it and began to be healed.

There was nothing that inspired him with greater respect than did Giovanni's unfaltering cheerfulness. That a man who had seen the cause he loved go down; who, in failing health, dared not seek an asylum in his own country, but must live and die an exile; who,

in one terrible sweep, had lost all he held dear; and who now knew himself in the clutch of an inexorable disease, and could bear himself not only with patience and courage, but with cheer, could find delight in his work, could enter with the zest of a boy into the charm of new music and the beauty of the world around—was a thing to be reverenced.

One morning after breakfast as the two men were preparing to go off on their several avocations, Roger caught sight of a well-known figure coming up the steps to the front door.

"There's Knowles coming to speak to you," he said. "I shall levant." He slipped into his little den while the bell was being answered. In a moment the door was pushed open.

"It is you Knowles wants, Dodge," said Ercolani, and left them together.

"I have had a letter from your wife, Redway," began the visitor, without any circumlocution, "and it seemed to me the proper thing was to bring it to you before I answered it."

Roger's tongue never hurried him into hasty speech. He expressed none of the astonishment he felt, as he held out his hand in dead silence for the letter the other proffered. It was very brief and businesslike.

". . . Long ago," she wrote, "you promised me introductions to musical people in town who might help me on. I suppose you could still give them to me, and I should be very glad. Everything is so crowded. Lessons are plentiful enough if one is cheap, but I don't want to be cheap, and I want to do

something better. What I really want is to get engagements to sing. . . ."

Roger handed it back. "Thanks," he said; "I suppose you can do it?"

"Certainly I can if you wish it. I did not choose to help Mrs. Redway without your knowledge."

"I am very much obliged to you, but I can have no objection. Mrs. Redway and I have agreed to go each our own way. She prefers work in town to work in Pinecliff; I prefer Pinecliff."

Knowles looked at him curiously. "Well, good-morning," he said, going towards the door. But before he reached it Redway took a step after him.

"Look here," he said, "I suppose it is not necessary to say, you'll be a little careful what sort you give her. There are lots of impresarios and fellows who—well, you know what I mean:—A woman alone."

"Certainly. I had thought of Madame Salieri Smithson; she has an excellent school of singing, and launches people extremely well; or there is old Benedetti—a regular grandfather."

Going up the hill to the Palm-house, Knowles overtook Ercolani.

"I suppose you understand Redway's affairs," he said. "What on earth does it mean? a wife and not a wife! One minute he declares that she is nothing to him and he has washed his hands of her, and the next he is in a state of mind lest one should let any harm come to her."

"Don't ask me," said Ercolani. "I don't profess to understand your Englishwomen."

"Don't call them my Englishwomen. Thank God, I have nothing to do with any of them!"

XXVI.

JUDITH GILDERDALE was one of those people who play best alone or to one congenial listener. She would never be a show pianiste, but she had a gift which made her a better interpreter of Chopin than many a more brilliant performer. It was not only that her long fingers had the singing touch that let no thread of melody be lost through all the maze of arabesques, not only her perfect sense of balanced rhythm and significant phrasing, but the power of entering by a singular affinity into all the moods of that complex nature: not the tender, dreamy, poetic alone, but the wild, the fantastic, the bizarre, found expression. It was strange, perhaps, that it should have been so: that this quiet woman whose outward life had been so calm and uneventful should have been able to give utterance to all the passion, all the ecstasy, the dark moods as well as the bright, the fantasy as well as the poetry with which his work brims over. Possibly the quiet life sought its one emotional outlet there.

One morning she had taken up the Preludes, and had been playing some while when she became aware that she had a listener; there was no sound, but she felt that she was playing to some one, and looking round she saw that Redway had entered noiselessly and was standing behind her.

"I am so sorry I came in," he said. "I ought to

have listened outside, but it was a magnet. Do please go on."

She was in the mood to play; she turned a leaf or two and continued. It was the Prelude in A flat she had chosen, the one with a sound of a death-knell through all the last repetition of the beautiful subject. Some have thought they heard in it the foreboding of the composer's approaching death. Perhaps what he heard was the knell of the love that had failed him, the farewell to the sweetest earthly joy, which he was never to know.

The listener stole softly to the window and stood there, but his eyes were not on the river, but on her face. She was far too much absorbed to be conscious of them, but presently when she ceased, and turning met his gaze, there was something there that gave her a moment's uneasiness. She rose from the piano and began turning over the pile of music that lay at hand.

"We must get to work," she said, speaking more briskly than her wont. "I must not waste any more of your precious time. I have been practising the Grieg Sonata, but I find it horribly difficult. Shall we try it?"

"Not to-day," he said, "if you don't mind. I am not in the mood for Grieg. Let us take that Rubinstein thing."

She assented, and they began the Sonata in D, the most beautiful that that unequal composer has ever written. She had never heard Redway play like this before. She did not feel as if she were playing an accompaniment, but rather as though she were herself part of the instrument on which he played. The violin

seemed to lend strong pinions on which she felt herself borne along. After the slow movement they ceased, and she turned to him with a slight flush on her face.

"Ah, that movement again," she said; "the last half—from here."

She rose and standing beside his desk laid her hand an instant on the page, pointing to the passage. As she took it away, with a sudden impulsive movement he stooped and pressed his lips where her fingers had rested.

She saw, and would have thought it fancy but for the rush of crimson that mounted to his forehead as his eyes met hers. She turned quickly back to the piano.

"On second thoughts, we will not have an encore," she said; "it is always a mistake. We will take Grieg now."

She found the place and dashed into a prelude in a key quite foreign to the one she wanted. As she found her way from one modulation to another, feeling that she must play on at all hazards, she tried to realise what had happened and what it meant. Oddly enough, it seemed more significant than if he had kissed the hand itself: that might pass for an act of exaggerated homage, but this must mean a very different feeling. Was it wisest to take no notice? She was well aware that he knew she had seen it, and her face flamed. It is often best to let things be as though they had not been; but there comes a moment when to ignore is to permit. And she could permit nothing that should mar his loyalty or hers

Was it possible that she who had thought to help

him, to be an influence for good, could have herself become a snare to him? The risk of such a thing had never presented itself to her. Her seniority emphasised by her white hair her position, setting her so entirely aloof from him that their lives touched but at one point, no less than the fact that the sorrow which had for awhile brought him close to her sympathies had been sorrow for another woman, had set such a possibility wholly out of view. She had been quite blind to certain signs of late that perhaps would not have been lost on a more worldly woman; but in such matters Judith was as inexperienced as a child. She felt as if she were in some horrible nightmare, as, without thought, almost without consciousness, she mechanically went through the difficult music before her. The Sonata was a long one, but they played to the end without pause; then she rose from the piano.

"I think that will be sufficient for to-day," she said.

He bowed silently and began to put up his instrument.

She remained standing, and presently spoke with a certain effort. Her face was blanched.

"I think," she said, "we will not have any more practices at present. Sir Hervey and I shall be going away in a few weeks, and shall be away some time, and in the meantime we shall have people staying in the house and shall be a good deal occupied. This must be our last."

His face was as white as hers, as he looked up from the violin-case he was fumbling with.

"Is this my sentence of banishment?"

"If you take it so, yes."

There was a minute's dead silence. She had nothing to add, nor he anything to extenuate. His fingers were unconsciously tightening the keys of his violin. A sudden sharp sound broke the stillness; one of the strings had snapped.

He fastened the case, then straightened himself and looked at her with a certain dignity.

"You are quite right. It will be better that I should not come here any more at present. Good-bye."

He did not approach her nor offer his hand, but went silently away through the sunlit garden into the dark pinewood, and the gate of his Eden closed behind him.

As he entered the dim shadowy wood, with its long pillared aisles roofed in with dense interlacing branches which winter never thinned, with its dark rust-coloured carpet from which the November mists were rising like blue smoke, it oppressed him as with a sense of immeasurable loss and woe. The silence was like death; there was no rustle, nor stirring of life amongst the bracken; only the hush was enfolded with the long sound of the reverberating wave. He felt it intolerable, and, leaving the broad main alley, made his way out through the gnarled stunted pines that fringed the wood on the seaward side, to the edge of the cliff whence he could look down upon the breakers that came heaving in from the far horizon, and fell in one long line with a sound like thunder slowly travelling along the sand.

Any one with an ear delicately attuned to every sound in nature as well as in music, may perhaps understand how the deep reiterated rhythm soothed the trouble of his spirit. He himself could not have told

how or why strength came into him while he listened. Perhaps it may have been the hint of "Infinite passion, and the pain of finite hearts that yearn."

What was it that had come to him? Was it good? Was it evil? Was it heaven? Was it hell? Something it had of sharp agony, and something of a beauty beyond all his dreaming. From the tomb of the simple natural human love that Em had stung to death, had arisen something mystical and strange that amazed him. He had never dreamed it was love, till to-day, when Chopin's appealing passion had let loose a feeling that had broken into sudden flame. He had thought it was gratitude he had felt when her soft voice had brought him comfort, when she had touched him with a hand as cool as aspen leaves, though so tender. Yet even now it was not love as men count love; it had no personal wish or hope. It was

> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow.

He recognised that there was in it an element of danger. The good gift of fire has its dangers. Yet if he could master his passion instead of being swept before it, he would be the nobler man for having felt it.

But for the present his sentence was banishment. She had willed it so, and he acquiesced.

XXVII.

Madame Rose Alba, as she now styled herself, had at length attained the summit of her ambition. She was about to appear on a London stage, not indeed in the leading rôle, but in a very good part—a part written expressly for her by the composer, Valentine Garcia. Her cup of pride was not, however, filled to the brim. She rather resented not being the chief character, though Garcia explained to her that not even his influence would induce any London manager to intrust the whole success of a new venture to such inexperienced hands. She had played flower-girls and bridesmaids and peasant maidens for months, and she fancied herself quite competent to hold the stage as heroine, enjoying the not uncommon conviction that her rendering would have been very superior to that which the house was applauding.

Another cloud over her felicity was that it was only a matinée at which she was to appear, one of those affairs at which it is the fashion to "try on" a new composer or a new singer, before producing them to confront the serious criticism of a first night. Still she was aware that it had its importance, and on her afternoon's success would depend her chance of obtaining a permanent engagement, which had only been promised her provisionally.

Not reputation only, but maintenance, depended on it, for her own money, over which she had assumed

entire control, was seriously diminished, as she had put most of it into one of Mrs. Temple-Smith's wonderful undertakings, which was to pay a high interest and double its capital in no time, but in the meanwhile had ceased to pay at all.

She had been looking forward to the event with the utmost eagerness; but now it had come, she found herself wishing it well over. Fate had not been kind to her. She had a cold, and the dressmaker had sent home her gown with something radically wrong with the cut of the skirt. Garcia lunched with her under the mistaken idea of keeping her up to the mark, but he was himself in such a condition of excitement and fuss that it got upon her nerves, and his exhortations to her to do this and avoid that and be sure and remember the other, his appeals to her gratitude, his reminders that the success of his operetta largely depended on the interpretation of the performers, made her grow minute by minute more uneasy, more distrustful of herself.

He had been very anxious to coach his heroine, Lotty Lister; but that young woman, who had had considerable experience, declined to be dictated to. He had been present at every rehearsal, making suggestions and explaining his point of view and intentions at great length, till she lost patience. "Now look here, Mr. Garcia," she had said, "do you want me to undertake the part and do the best I can with it? If you do you must let me alone. If you are to come ambling round with suggestions at every point, I shall simply chuck the whole thing." Rose Alba, unluckily for her, was too dependent on Garcia's favour to venture on a similar line of conduct.

By the time the hansom deposited her and the composer at the stage door, she was dazed and trembling, hoarse and tired with practising as well as with talking ; for not satisfied with having known her part perfectly at rehearsal, she had been foolish enough to spend the whole morning working it up.

Mrs. Temple-Smith, who with Gage Orman had taken stalls in the very front, more on Garcia's account than on that of her protégée, whom it must be confessed she was getting a little tired of, was, however, glad to avail herself of her intimacy with the latter to penetrate behind the scenes and pay her a visit in her dressing-room. She found her in the hands of a severe-looking dresser who was administering sal-volatile.

"What, Em! You taking to nerves! I would never have believed it of you. Gage and I have been picturing you keeping up Val's fainting courage and laughing at him. You want some one to laugh at you. I wish I had brought Gage round; she would soon have scoffed you into a more suitable frame of mind."

"He worried me so!" said Em indignantly, gulping down the sal-volatile and making a face.

"Oh, he's in an awful state of mind, poor dear! He has gone to hide in the deepest recesses of the stage-box. I believe he is lying on the floor behind the fauteuils. Really, you know, the overture is going very well. Gracious! child, how your hand shakes! You ought to be ashamed of yourself"—as Em set down the glass on the marble-topped dressing-table with a clatter.

"I am not at all well," she plained. "I have caught a horrid cold, and I have been so worried about my

gown! Did you ever see such a cut?" She stood back a little to display it.

"Upon my word, it is atrocious!" cried Portia, undertaking willingly the rôle of Job's comforter. "Why, on the stage the front will look half-way up to your knees, and it droops behind. Can't you pin it or something?"—to the dresser.

"There's nothing to be done, Ma'am," said the woman remorselessly. "Madame Alba should go to a better place for her things. These cheap people are no good."

"What shall I do?" wailed Em, and two tears made tracks through the artistic roses of her cheeks.

"There now! Just see what you have done"—turning her round to the glass. "Now I shall have to make your face all over again, and it is much if I get you finished in time."

"Well, I shall go round to the front," said Portia. "I want to see the curtain go up. Keep up your spirits. Ta ta!"

"Never mind, Alba; don't cry, whatever you do, or perhaps you won't be able to stop," said the contralto who shared the dressing-room, and who was very busy pinning a huge bunch of roses into the bosom of her gown. "One always feels a little funny at first, but it will go off; and as to your frock—why, yours is a light comedy part, and people do wear their frocks very short for those. I wouldn't worry."

Em's tears were never very near the surface, and those which the anguish of disappointment at not looking her best had forced out, were disposed of before she had to go down-stairs in response to the call-bell. During the few minutes that elapsed before her cue,

she was aware that the stage-manager was haranguing her, but of what he said she had not the faintest idea.

Her cue arrived; some one gave her a little push, and she found herself walking unsteadily out into the open, and some one in front was trying to get up a little feeble applause. She had some sentences to speak before her song came, but her speaking voice never had sufficient weight and volume for a large space, and in her own ears it sounded thin and dead. It was a very full and a very smart house, but she was only aware of Mrs. Temple-Smith and Miss Orman, sitting in front, whispering together and shrugging their shoulders. They summarised for her the attitude of the whole audience, and she felt an angry impotence, a sense of inadequacy, of powerlessness to impress her conception of herself upon them.

For it was of herself, not of her part she was thinking. Hers was a rôle to play up to others, but she was hardly aware that there were any others, except that they seemed to get in her way and thwart her.

Then a voice from the gallery called out: "Speak up, can't you!" which so put her out that the words of her song went quite out of her head, and she had to sing nonsense till she could gather herself together again. When she went off she was greeted with reproaches.

"Madame Alba, I told you of the change of exit. What were you thinking of to come off this way?"

"You never told me a word of it," she said angrily.

"I did; the very last moment before you went on, that you might be sure not to forget."

Then the conductor:

"Madame Alba, this won't do at all. You must

put out more volume of voice. I am sure in the gallery you could hardly have been heard."

"I can't help it. I have a dreadful cold. I am sure I filled the theatre perfectly well at rehearsal."

"H'm! I don't know. It strikes me your voice is altogether too light for a full house. Well, we must do what we can for to-day. You must really exert yourself more and throw out your voice."

Last came Garcia:

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Rose, don't jeopardise the whole thing! I thought we were coming to utter grief in the prettiest scene of all, and it made me feel so ill."

She had nothing to do during the second act; in the third occurred her principal song. Her cold seemed to be getting worse every minute, and while she was on, taking silent part in the scene while the hero and heroine were getting through a long duet, the tickling in her throat became intolerable and she dared not cough.

When she stood forward for the song that to her was the event of the afternoon, the conductor signed vigorously to her. "More power," she could read in the motion of his lips, and she resolved to exert herself or perish in the attempt. No one who knew the sweet clear treble that belonged to her would have recognised for hers the ear-piercing shrieks that were striving to reach spaces beyond her scope; as to expression, the sole expression was of the agonised resolve to out-sing the hoarseness that was gaining momentarily upon her. The last refrain ended with a trill and roulade that swept up to the high C that was her pride. She had made Valentine put it in expressly for her. She gathered up her forces and took a deep

breath, but it went through her throat like a knife. She rushed at it despairingly, and it ended in a hoarse scream like the tearing of calico.

Some one laughed. Then every one laughed. They did not hiss; they were too kind for that: they simply laughed.

. . . . . .

Em spent the evening sitting crouched upon the hearth-rug with her head leaning against the seat of a chair, while the realisation of all that the disaster meant came slowly home to her. Valentine Garcia and the librettist were giving a little dinner to celebrate the event, and she had of course been bidden, but had excused herself curtly, almost rudely. Her cough was far too bad, she said, for her to think of going out again that night; she must nurse. She had been looking forward to it as the triumphant crown to a triumphant day; her evening gown—not a failure—was hanging ready in her wardrobe; but to go and be reproached—still worse to be pitied and excused—was not to be thought of.

For they had all been very kind to her; but to her the cruellest sting of all lay in the knowledge that she had not wrecked the play. If like Samson she had felt herself crushed under the falling ruins of the house she had pulled down, her personal fiasco would not have loomed so large; but the final scene, in which she bore no part, had gone with a dash that had carried the operetta into safe harbour. She herself had been swept out of the way like so much rubbish, while the rest had marched on to victory without her. At the conclusion, the composer had been called for, and had had a regular ovation; Lottie Lister was half smoth-

ered under the mountain of bouquets that had been thrown to her; only for her, not a call, not a flower—only a merciful oblivion.

She had overheard Garcia, as she was trying to hurry away unobserved:

"Well done, Lottie! You pulled us through gallantly. I thought for a moment it was all up with us. If it had not been for you—"

Then Mrs. Temple-Smith had caught her before she had been able to make her escape:

"Never mind, my dear. After all you have not done much harm. Luckily your part was unessential. Do go home and take care of that horrid cold, or you will be laid up. Really you are not strong enough for this sort of thing. That little Lister is as strong as a horse."

No; it had not signified to anybody but herself, and nobody cared.

She sat on, staring into the fire while the whole scope of the disaster gradually unfolded itself.

It meant humiliation and the utter downfall of all her pride. It meant failure, entire and irretrievable. It was not likely that any manager would give her an engagement after so conspicuous a fiasco.

It meant poverty. Whether she would ever see again any of that money she had so rashly invested, she could not tell; for the present, at any rate, no interest was forthcoming. She had found giving lessons a very shifting and unlucrative business here where she was comparatively unknown, and had to compete with hundreds ready to undersell her; at Pinecliff, under her husband's wing, it had been very different. She had thought to make an assured if not brilliant

income once she could get the opportunity of being heard: now she had had her chance, and it had melted away in her hands.

Last of all, she had a horrible misgiving that it meant the complete extinction of her voice. The sensation when it broke had been of such an extraordinary tearing that she felt sure something must have given way. When she thought of it, she sprang up and went to the piano, striking a few chords. The sound she uttered was hoarse, feeble, utterly beyond her control, and she threw herself down again with her head in the chair, and let the waves of despair rush over her.

In all her prosperous self-satisfied little life, she had rarely known what it was to want to be comforted. Oh, if only Ethel had not been in India! was her cry. Alice disapproved of her and would have nothing to do with her, and as to Bertha, she was in the north; and besides, no one ever went to Bertha to be mothered. She wished she could prevent herself recollecting how one day, cast down from her usual eminence by an intolerable fit of toothache, she had gone to Roger for consolation; how he had tried every heard-of and unheard-of remedy to give her ease, and, when all failed, had taken her into his arms and rocked her as he might have rocked Betty, with little foolish petting words, and his tender touch had done more for her than all the laudanum and Bunter's nervine. She found herself against her will murmuring over the words of one of her songs—a silly one she had always thought it; she never cared for it:

> Oh that 'twere possible, after long grief and pain,
> To feel the arms of my true love round me once again!

But she had murdered his love: it must have been so, or he could never have stayed away from her through all this long year.

Late that night the landlady was roused by the vehement, terrified pealing of Madame Alba's bell, and rushed down to find that she had broken a blood-vessel and thought she was going to die. The doctor, of course, was summoned in all haste, but he made very light of it. It was only in the throat; nothing serious—probably from a strain. She must keep quiet and give herself rest. "Sing?" in answer to her agonised query, "oh, well, certainly not before the summer."

XXVIII.

From one point of view the illness might have been considered fortunate for Rose Alba. Garcia took care that it was made the most of in the papers, and it went some way to excuse her failure; but on its practical side it was an awkward fact. There were the inevitable expenses for doctor and delicacies, and there was the unavoidable idleness. For weeks it was impossible for her to go out of doors, and the money was rapidly melting away, while there was no more coming in, and very little prospect of any more in the future. What could she do? Write to Roger? Never! If she had only not lost that wretched money, she felt almost ready to go to him and say: "I have made a mistake; I am very lonely and miserable. Take me back." But to have to say: "I have failed. I am poor; I cannot keep myself. Take pity on me," was a thing she could never bend her pride to. She would starve sooner.

The first day she was able to get out she went to consult Mrs. Temple-Smith, but not very hopefully; for she was acutely conscious that Portia did not care for failures. As she had expected, that much-occupied lady was too busy to give her more than a few minutes of her valuable time; she hastily scribbled down for her two or three addresses of offices where she might possibly hear of typewriting or secretarial work of some kind, but unluckily Em had had too little practice to be very rapid with the machine. For herself, Mrs. Temple-Smith declared that she had just

now more helpers than she had work for. "You see, my dear," she said, "it is no use in the world for me to employ people that I have to show how to do things; it is quicker to do them oneself. Come and have lunch with me one day the end of next week, will you? This week I am full up every day."

Portia's conscience was, however, not quite easy on the subject; but she had an ingenious method of shifting her responsibilities on to other people's shoulders, whereby she eased her own mind and kept her friends usefully employed: so she shuffled off the burden of Em on to Valentine Garcia the next time she saw him, and thought she had done well.

"Val," she said, "I wish you would go and look after little Mrs. Redway for me. The child has been quite ill since her fiasco, and the doctor says she is not to use her voice at present. Of course she cannot give singing lessons without; so what she is going to do, I'm sure I don't know. Just now I really have not time to be bothered. We have Charlotte Croucher coming over to lecture on 'The Soul made Visible,' and Gage and I have all the arrangements to make."

Valentine did not care at all about the soul made visible. He leaned back and laughed a little. "Oh, I'll go and look up the little Rose," he said, "and see what is to be done for her."

He thought he was very magnanimous, but he could afford it: for his operetta was drawing good houses, with a charming little American soprano in poor Rose Alba's part.

"Is it the old rooms in Gloucester Road?" he asked, "or did I hear she had moved?"

"Oh, dear, yes; those are far too expensive for her

now; she is rather down on her luck altogether. She has gone to a top floor in Binfield Gardens. I wager you don't know where that is."

"Poor little girl!" said Garcia. "A singing bird without a voice is rather a drug in the market, I'm afraid."

He found his way to Binfield Gardens before long, in the dusk of a cold afternoon, and Em thought him very kind.

"Oh, don't worry about it," he said, in answer to some faltering reference on her part to "that horrible afternoon." "After all there was not much harm done; the thing is fairly floated now, and getting a capital good run."

"Not much harm done!" From his point of view, perhaps not. How selfish men were!

He looked round the room with its dingy carpet and cheap trumpery ornaments, and the tawdry glass vases on the mantelpiece did more than anything else to bring the fact home to him that Em was the person to be pitied. His eye came back to her as she sat near him, pathetic and drooping, with all the starch taken out of her.

"It has been awfully rough on you, poor little girl," he said, drawing his chair a little closer, "and I don't quite see what is to be done. I did my best for you, didn't I?"

"Oh, yes, I know you did. It was just the horrible ill luck of my catching cold just then. I don't know what I am to do, I'm sure." Her voice choked a little and her eyes brimmed up. She pitied herself so intensely, and she was pulled down by her illness. She

always used to so despise women who cried; but one tear escaped and dropped into her lap.

"Oh, don't cry, dear," he said; "it quite upsets me. We shall think of something for you presently. If you are hard up, I can help you. I am pretty flush myself just now."

Emmie drew back and crimsoned. "Oh, you are very kind, but I could not think of it, thanks. If only I could find something to do!"

"What can you do, you see? That is the question."

"I suppose I must look out for a situation as companion or housekeeper or something."

He looked at her sideways, and smiled to himself. "By and by, when the warm weather comes, I am going to start a house-boat on the river, and have little Saturday to Monday parties. Suppose you come and keep house for me."

Em looked startled. "Oh, I don't think I could do that," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed a little. "Well, there is no occasion to be offended. It is rather late in the day, it strikes me, to put on virtuous airs. I understood you had broken with all those outworn conventions, and gone in for complete independence. I suppose I was a little sudden. You come and have supper with me to-night after the play, and we'll talk it over."

Em sprang to her feet, and her eyes blazed. Once she understood, there were no bounds to her indignation, and Valentine beat a rapid retreat, half angry, half amused, and wholly incredulous of her honesty of purpose.

But in this she was wholly honest. Such overtures

were abhorrent to her whole nature. Rebellious against her husband she might be, unfaithful never. The very defects of her character, her coldness, her self-absorption, helped her here. No feeling warmer than flattered vanity had ever moved her in regard to Valentine Garcia. What had happened gave her, more than any of her misfortunes had yet done, a sense of isolation, of being exposed defenceless to—she hardly knew what. She felt like a child who has rushed forbidden into danger, and finds itself forsaken, solitary, panic-struck.

She was still pacing about the room, her cheeks burning, when she heard another visitor mounting the stairs. Her impulse was to rush and intercept the servant with a "Not at home"; but she was too late. The door opened, and Lady Gilderdale stood on the threshold.

"May I come in?" she said. "Your servant told me I should find you."

For the maid-of-all-work considered that to show visitors up to the top story was quite outside of her functions. Emmie tried to collect herself, as she hastily pushed into their places the chairs which her passionate tramp about the room had sent in all directions. The lack of welcome in face and voice was, however, apparent, and Lady Gilderdale put out her hand.

"Don't trouble," she said. "I am not going to stay. I see this is an untimely visit. I ought to have sent up my name. I know it is very late, but I met my cousin at an 'at home' at Fusain Lacroix's studio, and she told me how ill you had been, so I drove

straight on; but I will come another day. No, don't come down with me. I can find my own way."

"Oh," said Emmie, "it is only that I am rather in disorder. I—I have been rehearsing a scene in a play. Please come in, if you will excuse an untidy room."

"Rehearsing? You are able to go on the stage then? I feared from what Mrs. Temple-Smith said—"

"Oh, only for my own amusement—" with a little short, hard laugh—"I have no voice now."

"And you are tired, and ought to rest. Better let me come and see you at a more convenient time. I assure you I shall not think it rude."

Emmie was divided between resentment at being taken at a disadvantage by this woman whose serene beauty always made her envious, and another feeling that she would not recognise; Lady Gilderdale came from Pinecliff, and towards Pinecliff, something that would not be silenced was stretching out longing hands. The unacknowledged feeling gained the day. She shut the door and pushed round towards the fire the most comfortable chair the room afforded for her visitor. Judith took it and began to loosen the sable at her throat, while her hostess tried to rearrange the fire, with shaking hands that made the fire-irons clatter noisily.

The ordinary morning-call talk did not come easily. The two, such utter strangers and so aloof in the outward circumstances of their lives, had come too close on their last interview. Judith looked up after a moment. "How is Betty?" she said.

"Oh, poor little soul, she isn't very well. I don't think London agrees with her. Would you care to

see her? I put her to bed very early this evening, but I don't think she is asleep. I heard her just now."

She went into the back room, and returned in a moment with Betty, wide awake and perky as ever, in a little pink flannelette nightgown. Judith held out her arms, and whether it was the motherly touch or the soft feel of the sable, Betty, who usually hotly resented strangers, sat on her lap quite contentedly. Her mother knelt on the floor and turned up the nightgown to show the little thin legs.

"There! did you ever see such spindle-shanks for nearly three years old?" she said. "I declare I am quite ashamed of her."

"Poor wee mite! I don't think London is very good for such little folks, and I dare say since you have been ill, you have not been able to give her much fresh air."

"No, she has really been horribly neglected. I had to part with her maid; I could not afford a servant in lodgings. Do you know, I think I shall send her back."

Judith looked at her. "Not send her; take her, you mean. Don't you think it is time you both went home?"

Emmie rose from the floor and began to poke the fire again.

"Oh, there are a good many reasons why it is impossible for me to think of going back to Pinecliff at present. I think I shall pack Betty in a basket like a kitten—she isn't much bigger than one—and send her by rail. I suppose he would take her in," she added with a sort of half laugh.

Lady Gilderdale leaned forward and looked

earnestly into her face. "Tell me: is there any real reason you should not go back?"

"What do you mean by a real reason?"

"I think you know what I mean. You have done nothing for which you cannot ask your husband to forgive you?"

Emmie paced about the room. "Nothing, nothing!" she cried. "But I cannot go back as a suppliant, a failure. I would beg my bread, I would starve sooner."

"Then it is only pride that keeps you away! Oh, my dear, don't let a miserable rag of pride wreck your life and his. Verily I am afraid if you don't go back now you never will."

"But do you think he wants me—now?" She had come back and crouched down again on the hearth-rug, staring into the glowing coals.

"I think he needs you. It is not good for a man to be alone."

There was silence for a minute, while Emmie pondered whether the change of phrase were accidental, and dared not ask.

"Have you seen him lately?" she inquired presently.

"Not very lately; not since November. We have been away, you know."

"You mean it very kindly, and I dare say you think our difference is a thing that might be patched up or got over somehow; but you don't in the least understand the position," said Emmie, seating herself in a chair and trying to resume a more ordinary manner. "Why, positively, I don't even know his address."

"He has never written to you?"

"Never once. You see he has cut me off as completely as if I had never belonged to him. And I used to think he cared so much for me!" she added low, almost to herself.

Judith lifted her head, which she was bending over the child.

"And you could trade upon that knowledge to treat him as you did!"

Emmie made a restless movement. She was not accustomed to have her conduct held up before her own eyes, save in Mrs. Temple-Smith's distorted perspective. True, her sister Alice had told her what she thought of her, but she had never been used to heed Alice's opinions. She flushed up.

"I did what I thought right," she said. "Every human being owes a certain duty to himself—or herself."

"Plainly, Mrs. Redway, I don't understand your new gospel; I don't believe in it. Surely these insistent selves of ours get enough without our deliberately setting them up on a pedestal for our own worship. Do you remember the story of Galahad and the 'siege perilous'? 'If I lose myself, I find myself.' Probably the development you think so much about would have come to you through the very circumstances you chafed against."

"You don't understand," cried Emmie impatiently. "I wanted to be myself. I was sick of being somebody else's shadow."

"All the same," said Judith, "I doubt if you would have been any better satisfied that your husband should be yours. If you would, you are very unlike most women."

"Of course I did not want that. I should have despised him. But it is time men were taught that we are quite as valuable and important as they are. If marriage is to continue, it must be as an equal partnership of mind with mind."

"My dear Mrs. Redway, we have not waited for the nineteenth century to reveal to us the high ideal of the marriage of true minds—of the perfect friendship, comradeship, which is possible in that relation; but it does not often come ready made: it has to be lived up to by slow degrees. God gave you a very precious gift, and it lay in your hand to work the highest with it; but because it was not faultless, you chose rather to break it and throw it away. If you are wise, you will pray Him to let you have another chance."

"And you would have one go back to the old despicable ideal of 'Patient Grizzel'?" murmured Emmie.

Judith smiled a little. "By no means; she is a lady I never had any admiration for. It is not for any one to dictate how much of yielding there should be on the one side or the other; but I would just ask you: did you ever hear any duet in which both instruments played the same melody at the same time, or in which one had not a subordinate part? In music, at any rate, the idea of equality is an impossible one."

"After all," said Emmie wearily, "what is the use of discussion? I shall never go back now; it is far too late. If he had wished it, he would not have let me alone all these months. But I should like," she

added, "to know where he is, because of sending Baby."

"Do you really mean to send her? Could you part with her?"

Two sudden tears brimmed over. "Oh, I must! I promised I would not let any harm come to her, and I cannot take proper care of her now."

"I shall be going home myself next Tuesday. If you cannot make up your mind to take her yourself, which would be by far the best plan, I will take her. But you shall have the address. To think of your not knowing! He has been living nearly a year with Signor Ercolani and his sister in St. Regulus Terrace. You know he let the house?"

"Yes, I know; I saw it in the paper. Of course I could have found out where he was, only I would not; I did not care."

Judith stood up. "I must go now. Oh, my dear, don't be proud and hard to him if—" She did not finish her sentence, but stooped and kissed Emmie as she put Betty back into her arms.

Going home, she lay back in the corner of the carriage, with a soul weariness upon her that was like bodily exhaustion. "Did I do right?" she asked herself. "Did I say all that might be said, and not too much? Will it come right, and will he be happy?" But she knew that there was one thing that mattered more than his happiness.

XXIX.

The morning was wet and cold. Even Pinecliff was drowned in rain, and pierced through with icy blasts. Ercolani, attended by the faithful Marta, was in his narrow front hall, suffering himself to be inducted into a greatcoat and wound up in many comforters, when the telegraph-boy handed in a yellow envelope for Redway. Telegrams were of frequent occurrence in that house, and neither felt any particular curiosity till a voice from the back room called "John" in a rather agitated tone, and Giovanni went in.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I must go up to town to-day. I have just had a wire to tell me my wife is ill; I must go up and see for myself. Could you get hold of a messenger, do you think? I must send and put off my work."

"All right; I'll see to it. Don't you worry. You give me your book, and I will write for you."

"You're a good old sort," said Roger gratefully. "Then I'll be off." He was hastily turning over Bradshaw as he spoke.

"Nothing serious, I hope?" For the fingers that fluttered the leaves shook.

"No, I don't think so. It only says—'far from well.'"

The message was from Lady Gilderdale, and ran: "Have seen E. to-day, at 93 Binfield Gardens. Very far from well. Think you should go up."

He put it in his pocket. "Look here," he said, "if I should find her willing to come home, could I bring her here? Would the Signorina mind?"

"Of course not; I'll answer for that. Marta loves a little sick-nursing. Don't scruple."

"Thanks, awfully! But no—I don't think I will. We'll get rooms if necessary."

"But why?"

"Why, there's the kid, you see; a child in the house would be an awful nuisance."

"My dear fellow, were you thinking of me? Don't you fancy it would hurt me to have her; it would do me good. Now off with you, or you'll miss your train."

When the cab from Waterloo Station deposited Roger at the gate of 93 Binfield Gardens it was still pouring; that unutterably cold, dirty London rain that makes one wonder that so many intelligent human beings should select such a place of abode. The streets were pea-soup, and the very skies seemed mud, and a chill, heavy depression lay over the river like a pall.

As Roger let the dripping, rusty gate clang behind him, and ran up the sodden strip of gravel, he remembered how he had once before tried to call upon his wife, and saw in his mind's eye the yellow and red dahlias in front of Rose Villa in the October sunshine. Binfield Gardens might be poverty-stricken, but there was nothing Bohemian about them; even in desolation they were eminently respectable, actually going the length of standing modestly back in what might be called by courtesy a front garden, adorned with a sooty plane-tree and two half-dead laurels, trimmed

round, too, with a remnant of worn-out box-edging. It was one of those streets that began by being suburban with a flavour of the country, but have got swallowed up in the march of Kensington westward, and the little houses, till they are demolished to make way for flats, drag out a precarious existence as lodgings, or display the cards of milliners in a small way of business. One could predicate the inhabitants exactly, from a view of the outside. There was undoubtedly a permanent gentleman in the dining-room, a dressmaker in the drawing-room, and a music-mistress *manquée* on the top floor. Poor Em! So this had been the end of her ambitious flight!

Highly respectable, too, was the person who presently answered the bell: the mistress of the house, presumably, to judge by her brown merino gown and cameo brooch.

"Madame Alba is not at home," she said, and prepared to shut the door.

"Not at home? You mean she is not seeing anybody?"

"I mean what I say, sir."

"But I understood that Madame Alba was ill."

"She has been ill, sir, and she ought not to be out in such weather. I told her so, but she had business and she went."

"What time do you expect her back?"

"I could not say, sir, I am sure. She did not leave word."

"Very well, I'll come in and wait for her."

The expression of Miss Wragge's whole spare person, as she planted herself squarely in the doorway,

said: "Will you?" But her reply in words was: "Do you wish to leave a card or a message?"

Redway took out one of his professional cards, judging that, since Em had been trying to get musical employment, that would serve him best. He did not quite want to say he was her husband, since she had chosen to pass under another name. Miss Wragge perused it attentively and eyed him from head to foot.

"Did you call in answer to Madame's advertisement?" she asked.

"I came in answer to a telegram I received at Pinecliff this morning. I am only in town for a few hours, and in this out-of-the-way part it is extremely inconvenient to me to have to go away and come again later."

"And in such weather too," said Miss Wragge, relenting. "Very well, sir, step this way, please." And she preceded him up three flights of stairs, whereof the carpet grew shabbier and shabbier at each remove.

"Is the little girl here?" he asked, as he followed her into the room. She wondered that a strong-looking young man should seem so out of breath.

"She is down-stairs in the basement, sir, playing with the cat. Her mamma asked me to mind her this afternoon, as it was too wet for her to go out."

"Oh, bring her up!" he said impatiently, as he went to the window and pulled up the blind with a jerk.

While the woman was gone, he looked round. What a contrast to the smart, luxurious rooms, gay with chrysanthemums, where he had seen Emmie last!

And she so loved luxury and pretty things! Poor little soul!

"She is very shy with strangers, sir," said a voice in the doorway. "There, go and say how-de-do to the gentleman, pretty; there's a love!"

Miss Wragge had not taken the trouble to make Betty any toilet. She stood there with touzled hair over her eyes, in a scarlet frock and a very dirty pinafore: for she had been cuddling the cat, who came off smutty upon everything; indeed she had him now, clasped tight round the waist, while with the other hand she held on to a fold of Miss Wragge's gown. Roger was careful not to startle her. He stooped to her level without coming too close, and held out his hands to her.

"Will you come," he said, "my Betty?"

Betty looked a minute: then away went puss, she dropped the protecting gown, and in an unsteady toddle cast herself into his arms with a delighted gurgle: "Dadda, Dadda!"

"Why, she knows me!" he cried with dewy eyes, as he lifted her up. "To think of it, after all this time, and such a mite as she is!"

He turned his back on Miss Wragge, and walked to the window murmuring tendernesses into the baby's ear.

"I need not keep you," he said presently over his shoulder, finding the good woman still lingering. "The child will be all right with me."

Miss Wragge cleared her throat. "Excuse me, sir," she said; "I understood Madame Alba was a widow."

"A widow! What do you mean?" Then catching sight of her scandalised countenance he broke into a

short laugh. "I am not underground yet, thank you. You do not seem to be aware that Alba is merely my wife's professional name. My work is at Pinecliff, and it suited Mrs. Redway to be in town for a time."

Miss Wragge murmured an indistinct apology and withdrew.

The afternoon wore on slowly, though Betty did her best to entertain him. She fetched her Sunday picture-book out of the cupboard, and explained all the pictures to him. Then she told him a long tale about the lions and tigers she had seen at the Zoo, mixed with giants and dwarfs out of her own queer little head. Then they had a ride to Banbury Cross and other exciting pastimes of that nature, till, as the dusk drew on, she got sleepy and nestled down into the hollow of his arm for a nap.

Would Emmie never come! The memory of those long days of seeking and waiting and never finding came back on him, and he lived them through again: for it was too dark now to do anything; besides, he would not stir, lest he should wake the child.

At last a voice on the stairs, coming up—a fretful, tired voice.

"Oh, Miss Wragge, I have had such a day of it! I thought I should never get back; and then I got into the wrong omnibus and had to walk ever so far, and it was all in vain after all. I am wet through and tired out. Do let me have some tea soon. What did you say? A gentleman? Oh, you know I said you were never to let that man in again. What, a different gentleman? Oh, perhaps he has something for me to do."

"I was that flustered," said Miss Wragge after-

wards, detailing the circumstances to a friend, "that tell her it was her husband, I simply couldn't. I let her go up."

Next moment she was in the room, and saw in the dusky firelight a man rising from a chair and gently putting Betty off his knee. She could not see his face, but she knew who it was. And then Miss Wragge brought in the lamp and set it on the table; and as the light fell on him, she felt it was the same, yet another, an older, different Roger from the one she remembered; and she was afraid.

"Oh, is it you?" she said. And then they both waited a moment till the woman should be gone. Emmie stood, in the pitiless glare of the lamp, in a waterproof and an old hat, trying to unbutton shabby gloves with fingers that shook. The instant that the door was shut, he came to her and took her hand, bending over her.

"My poor little girl!" he said. "Why didn't you write to me?"

The face, the manner, might seem for a moment strange, but the voice, with its familiar intonation, with the little personal trick of speech she remembered so well, went home to her. Just at first she tried to draw away, to struggle against the impulse to yield, but she was tired out with battling. With a quick movement she turned to him, and, hiding her face against his coat, began to sob. He had never seen Em cry before; he would have said he did not believe she could, and it moved him strangely. He put his arm round her, and with his other hand took off her wet hat and stroked her ruffled head.

"You poor little girl!" he repeated. "There, don't

cry. I have come to take care of you, and you need not bother about anything."

He made her sit down by the fire, and knelt beside her, making her lean against him. Emmie wept on, enjoying for the first time in her life what most women know very well, the luxury of an utter surrender. Betty, who had recaptured the cat and been amusing herself with it, came out of her corner and regarded her mother with astonished disapproval. "Naughty!" she said; "mustn't k'y." Her father signed her away; Betty was *de trop* just then.

Presently Em lifted her head from his shoulder.

"Oh, Dodge, I have been very horrid to you," she said. "Have you really forgiven me?"

He looked into the fire, not at her. "Don't remind me of that now. I can't go back. Let it be enough that you are coming home with me."

She did not in the least understand him. She raised her head, and tried to look into the dark eyes in which there was a new reserve, then let her head sink back upon his shoulder. He was going to take her home, and for the present that was enough.

After a silent minute or two he got up. "The first thing," he said, "is to get you dry. Here, stand up and let me get that wet cloak off. Shall I find some slippers in the next room?"

He busied himself waiting upon her, took off her wet boots and warmed her little shoes. As he held them to the fire, a curious impersonal memory came to him of a man who had snatched up a little rubbed shoe just like this and held it an instant as though it had been a precious jewel, and then flung it away like a poison. Then the maid came in with the paraphe-

nalia for high tea, and he went over to the window where the blind had not yet been drawn down, and stood looking out—looking into the invisible night, rather: for the reflection of firelight and lamplight made all outside a blackness.

Emmie lay back in the low chair where he had put her, and felt that the dénouement of her story had come. She had been wilful and rebellious, she acknowledged that, and had courted disaster; and then in the crisis of her troubles, when she felt she could bear no more, had come the husband whose love she had slighted, ready to take her home, and all would be well. She felt as the children say: "quite good now."

To him it was not so simple. In the novels and plays, after misunderstanding and estrangement, comes the moment when, Hey presto! all is changed; the husband and wife rush into each other's arms and live happy ever after. But if this were the moment, he was not ready. The experiences of the past year had bit too deep. He felt that he and Em were still standing each side of the chasm that had opened between them, and which had gone on widening through this long year. It might in time be bridged over; he honestly meant to try, but to ignore the past and pick up his life again at the moment when Em had been singing of red poppies—it was impossible. He meant to begin afresh, but it must be a fresh beginning; it could never be the old again.

He came to the table when the servant had uncovered the chops and withdrawn, with his plan made. "It is not raining now," he said. "I don't believe it would do you a bit of harm to take the journey to-

night. We could catch the mail train. I don't want to leave you and have to come up again."

He expected opposition, but for the moment Em had completely surrendered herself into his hands. She only said: "Oh, but Dodge, my packing!"

"You will have nearly an hour. I will do it for you as soon as we have fed."

She rather liked the suddenness; there was something dramatic about it.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked with the curiosity of a child.

"Oh, for the present to Ercolani's, where I am living. I shall send him a wire before we start. Luckily my tenants get out in about ten days, so we can take possession. I was in treaty with some others, but we can break that off." He stopped and went into a muse, remembering how he had taken Em there in the first days of their marriage. He wondered if she thought of it too, and how it looked to her.

For her all seemed strange and dreamlike. She lay upon her bed and watched him while he packed her things and Betty's with a certain swift decision that made her reconsider Mrs. Temple-Smith's favourite maxims about the general incapacity and fecklessness of men. It seemed still a dream when the cab was at the door, and she was wishing the astonished Miss Wragge good-bye. Then followed a confusion of luggage and porters at Waterloo, and she was in the express, spinning through the black night with Roger opposite to her and Betty on her lap.

She was too tired to think connectedly; through most of the journey she dozed, but at one moment she started broad awake, stung by a sudden thought,

a sudden perception, that came to her as such things have a strange way of doing, just as she was losing consciousness in sleep. Roger had never kissed her. He had put his arm round her, had let her lean against him, had touched her with a tender pitying hand, but his lips had never sought hers. She shivered and stirred. In a moment he roused and bent forward from his corner.

"What is it?" he said. "Here, let me take Betty; she is too heavy for you. What is the matter? Are you feeling bad?"

"No, no; only I wish I had not come. How foolish I was to let you bring me away all on a sudden like this without—without anything. I was so dazed I don't think I knew what I was doing."

"Don't, dear," he said, speaking very low, for there were others at the further end of the carriage. "You must not look back now."

He sighed heavily as he rolled Betty more warmly in a rug and settled her on his knee. He wondered what it meant. Was she looking back with regret to somebody in that other life of hers of which he knew nothing? It seemed to him that reconciliation was a very difficult business.

It was not much like a home-coming to Emmie. The strange house in which she had rarely set foot, the way they welcomed Roger and fussed with him and seemed to set her aside, all chilled and discouraged her; and when presently she found herself handed over to the Signorina and her tisanes, she felt almost more abandoned than when she lay with her head on a chair and bewailed her failure. She had yet to learn how hard it is to turn back.

XXX.

They had been back in their own house a week or two. Roger had rather hurried their return, for he found the combined household did not answer. He had thought it would be good for his wife, till she was stronger, to be saved the trouble of housekeeping and the inevitable bothers of a move; but he soon saw there was friction, and it would not do. Emmie and the Signorina were not very harmonious, and, what was odder, Emmie seemed to have conceived an intense dislike to John. The only two perfectly happy in the arrangement, were John himself, and Betty, who struck up a very decided flirtation. Marta had at first watched anxiously, and tried to keep the baby out of her brother's way, fearing the effect of the little chirping voice, the pattering feet about the house; but when she saw the smile on his face as he sat with Betty on his knee, making orange pigs for her, she let them be.

"I am terribly sorry to lose you, Dodge," said Giovanni on the last evening. "I shall miss you more than I can say; but you are quite right to go. I can see your life will never pull straight till you and she are in your own home by yourselves."

One night Roger was standing out on his doorstep, getting a breath of fresh air and finishing a pipe before locking up for the night. Some one turned in at the gate and blundered straight into the laurel bushes. He ran down and took him by the arm.

"Hullo, Knowles! Is it you?"

"How abominably badly lighted these side roads are," said the visitor irritably; "it is a perfect scandal. You don't mind a late visit, I hope. I wanted to see you rather particularly, and there is no catching you by day."

"Come in!" Redway led the way to the dining-room, where a little fire still lingered. "The wife is gone to bed," he remarked, "so if you want to talk business we shall be quite undisturbed."

He wondered much what Knowles could want with him, for though there had been amity between them for some time, the old friendly relations had never been resumed.

Knowles followed him into the room, stumbling over a chair and groping with his hand till he came to an anchor.

"The matter I came about is this," he began in his characteristic abrupt manner. "I used to think once you had a desire to stand in my shoes; do you wish it still?"

Roger stared at him. "I don't understand. You don't suppose that I—"

"No, no; but in truth you are the only fellow in Christendom I could endure to see there, and I can get you the appointment if you choose to have it."

Redway was still silent. He did not understand what it meant.

"If you don't take it," went on the other, "my work—our work will all go to pieces. I can see just how it will be."

"Why, what is going to happen to you?"

Knowles leant his head against the side of the man-

telpiece and groaned. "Oh, don't you know?" he said. "Haven't the fellows told you?"

"Of course I know—John told me—that you had been having trouble with your eyes; but surely, surely you are making too much of it. You always did look on the black side, you know."

"My sight is getting steadily dimmer day by day, and I fear the worst."

Roger came over to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Have you forgotten," he said, "how ten years ago you were in such an awful funk about your lungs? And look what a splendid time you have had since—what a splendid work you have achieved. Keep up your heart."

"Ah, it was death I was trying to face then; but darkness is worse than death."

"Have you had the best advice? Phillippe de Brosse was saying he wondered you did not go to Pagenstecher; you know he is supposed to work miracles."

"If I do, none the less I must give up my appointment. Alas! as you know, I could never get a score by heart. So I must resign. The point is this: If I do, will you take my post?"

"I can't tell you what it is to me that you should wish it; but you can understand it is not a thing one can answer out of hand. It must be thought over. What about Dacre? He'll expect it."

"Of course he will; but oh, Dodge, I cannot—I cannot leave it to him!"

"He is a very good musician."

"Oh, I know, but that is not all. I was an ass

when I tried to put him over your head. His ear and taste are as good, I suppose, as yours or mine, but as to leading—you know yourself he doesn't lead; and when it comes to conducting, the band conduct him."

Roger smiled. "I know. It is some element of personal force that is lacking, I imagine. But he'll be hurt, to be superseded."

"Less by you than by any one. You have made yourself a power. Oh, Dodge, why did I ever lose you? Why was I such a fool?"

"It had to come. I was a bad subordinate, I think."

"I look ahead," went on Knowles, "and I see my work that I have loved, all crumbling away. He'll go off with a flourish, and then presently he will lose the best men because they will not be commanded by a weaker man than themselves, and he will think to conomise and please the council by filling their places with cheap, showy men; and he'll take everybody's advice, and let the frivolous element encroach more and more till it gets down to the level of a variety entertainment. It will pay—oh, no doubt it will pay, and I dare say he will be accounted a more successful director than I have been; but my work—where will it be?"

"It is a big thing, Graham; you must give me time."

"I can't give you very long. It is rumoured about already that I shall have to resign, and Dacre may go to the council and secure a promise."

For a few minutes there was silence, while Redway revolved the matter and tried to look fairly at all its bearings. Then he spoke:

"Look here; suppose you apply for a year's leave,

and go to Wiesbaden and give yourself a chance. Get me appointed as your *locum tenens* simply; then I shall see how the thing would work. And there's your chance of coming back to it."

"I wonder if you realise what a generous offer that is."

"Well, will you accept it?"

"I hardly could, but that I believe I shall never take it from you again."

"I wonder," said Redway musingly, "what made you come to me. I thought you would have so hated putting me in your place. There was a time when you could hardly endure that any one should have a word of praise for me."

"I know. I was a jealous beast, and I acknowledge that when I first thought of it, I could not face it: it seemed that I would rather my work failed under another than succeeded under you—as I know it is bound to succeed. And then, when I sat alone with my trouble in the dark, I knew that after all I loved the work better than myself. Let me be forgotten if it may live!"

"I shall try and carry it out on the lines you laid down. You and I used to differ a good deal on detail, but I think in the main we were always at one."

"And you will write and tell me how it goes on? I swear I won't interfere; but when I think what the blank will be, my courage fails. I have lived so completely in and for it; I have nothing else."

"Remember I shall be holding it for you. I shall only be your viceroy till you come again."

He shook his head. "I don't buoy myself up with

any false hopes. Since you are so generous, I will take the year's chance; but I know I am doomed."

"How horribly hard it seems! I want to tell you how awfully sorry I am for you, but we have grown strange. I hardly know whether it is the enemy of yesterday, or the friend of years ago."

"Won't you let it be the friend of old days? Couldn't you try to forget? I have repented. Continually I have tried to tell you so, and bridge over the quarrel; but it was too difficult."

"I have not borne malice. I was awfully angry at the time, because I could not conceive what right you had to think I wronged you. I suppose we were both a little mad."

"I was; and the thing that rankles is that I should have sacrificed the reality of your friendship for a dream that burnt itself to ashes like a fire that has nothing to feed on. What made me so bitter was that it should have been *you* that had injured me. Any other fellow I could have forgiven; only not you."

"But you have now?"

"I want you to understand the position," went on Knowles, with his eyes on the fire. "You may fancy that a phantom still stands between us, but there is no such thing. What I loved was my own fancy, not your wife."

"I know. I soon saw that. Well, if the knowledge that I am still your friend, and will carry on your work loyally as you would yourself, is any comfort to you, you have it."

Far into the night they sat and talked: of the future and the plans which Knowles had made and would now never be able to carry out, save through his suc-

cessor; of the past that they had shared, strengthening many an old link. When at last they parted, Roger, who had seen his friend to his own door, returned to his house marvelling to himself. Friendship it seemed might rise again, like a phœnix, from its ashes. Could Love?

The day that he trod the familiar ground and took the baton in his hand once more, was a strange one to him. He found himself welcomed warmly, but with little demonstration: for every one felt keenly for the terrible misfortune which had come upon poor Knowles. Without being exactly popular, he had made himself respected, and much sympathy was felt for him. As one and another of the men came up to Redway with a word of greeting, and told him how glad they were to have him amongst them again, he felt rather like a regent receiving the fealty of his subjects; but the occasion was a shadowed one: it was rather a responsibility than a triumph.

As he came away and was passing the tea-room, he heard his name, and pausing saw Sir Hervey and Lady Gilderdale sitting at one of the little tables. He went in.

"Is one to congratulate you?" said Sir Hervey.

"Thank you, Sir Hervey, it is rather a melancholy business. I think we all feel a good deal for our old chief."

"To be sure; you must feel it so. But what I meant was, is it a good thing for you to have undertaken all this business? You will be burning the candle at both ends, I am afraid."

"It is rather an undertaking, but I could not have

done otherwise. If he recovers, as I hope he may, it will only be for a year."

"Sit down, won't you? and have some tea with us."

He hesitated a moment, and looked at Lady Gilderdale. She had given him her hand and uttered a low inquiry for Mrs. Redway, but now she was not looking at him; she was studying her programme. She did not indorse the invitation. He thought she looked more haughty than he had ever seen her—haughty and pale and weary.

"I am afraid I must not, thanks. I have to see a man about an appointment here. This brings, of course, an infinite number of things to be attended to."

"Well, you must not let your own playing suffer, whatever happens: that is too precious to be sacrificed. Try and make time to come up to Tristerwood for an occasional practice, won't you?"

Judith looked up from the programme. "I should hardly think that would be possible now," she said.

"No, I'm afraid it will not be at present. Thank you so much, Lady Gilderdale, for your wire about Mrs. Redway; without it I should have been completely in the dark."

"And she is better?"

"A little better, thanks, but by no means strong yet. We have been getting into our own house again, and it has been rather too much for her."

And then he went away.

XXXI.

Em was standing by the fire in her own drawing-room, looking round upon her restored domain. Everything was as it had been before she went away. All that the tenants had displaced was in its old order again, and her own belongings were unpacked. Outwardly it seemed as if there had never been any change, but she was far from realising that she was at home again. She leaned her elbow on the mantelpiece, and her head on her hand, and sighed. She was not tired; she only wished she had been: she was weary of doing nothing. There seemed nothing for her to do now. Beyond the simple ordering of the household, she was called upon for nothing. The little nameless services that a man looks for from his wife were never demanded from her now; Roger did everything for himself, and left her free to occupy her time as she chose.

She looked down at her husband as he lay back in the armchair beside the hearth, with his hands clasped at the back of his head, his eyes shut, his black eyelashes resting on his cheek, and it seemed to her that the Roger of her remembrance had vanished, and a strange man whom she could not understand, and over whom she had no power, had taken his place. It was not only that the year had made him look older—that he was thinner, darker, harder than he had been; not only that he was graver, more reserved than she had

ever known him, but there was a sense of distance between them that no effort of hers could bridge over. He was kind; oh, yes! more considerate than he ever used to be, but oh, the difference! How he used to come bounding up those stairs, eager for her kisses after ever so short an absence, brimming over with all that he had done, all that he wanted her to do for him! Now he came soberly in, asked her kindly how she felt and how she had been getting on, and went away to his practising-den, or snatched a brief rest.

She knew he was working too hard, and she knew she could help him if he would only let her. The conducting part of the business, and arranging the programmes, he thoroughly enjoyed; but all the intricate business affairs which Graham Knowles had had such a faculty for, were an incessant worry to him. He was resolute to let nothing slip, and he never spared himself. Often he practised far into the night, for whatever he sacrificed to the well-being of the orchestra, it should not be his own playing. He would not suffer the delicacy and firmness of wrist, the perfection of tone that he had won, to be impaired for want of using: so he was, as Sir Hervey had predicted, burning the candle at both ends. Luckily he had the gift, invaluable to a busy man, of being able to drop asleep when he got a few minutes' interval, as he had done this evening.

Presently he felt his wife's eyes upon him, breaking his rest, and he looked up at her. She was still standing by the mantelpiece, slim and fair in her white evening gown; so pretty! but with a weary, fretful look on her face.

"What is it?" he said. "Do you want anything? I am afraid I was asleep."

"Oh, I am sorry I woke you. No— Yes, I do. I want you to let me go away again."

He drew himself up and sat leaning forward, his hands resting on the arms of his chair. "Am I so hateful to you after all?" he said.

"Yes, yes!" she cried wildly. "I hate you; I do hate you. Oh, I didn't think you would have been so vindictive!"

He smote his hand upon the arm of the chair. "What have I done?" he cried. "In Heaven's name, what have you against me now?"

She began to cry passionately. "Oh, you are cruel, you are hard! I thought you were so kind and pitiful when you came to take me home, or I wouldn't have come. I suppose you want to pay me in my own coin."

"I can't understand you," he said despairingly. "You wanted liberty and independence; surely I have given you both. What more could I have done for you?"

"Oh," she cried, "I don't want to live in your house as a visitor, eating the bread of charity! It humiliates me to the dust. You don't want me; well, let me go then, and earn my own livelihood some way. I could at least be a nursemaid. I will leave you Betty, since she is the only thing you care for."

He looked at her in dumb perplexity and despair. She went on:

"Of course I ought to have said this before. I ought never to have let you leave the Ercolanis and take the house again; but somehow I fancied that

when we got home it would be different: but it isn't; it is more dreadful."

"Look here; it's time we talked this out and understood each other. The whole position seems impossible, somehow. I am afraid the only thing will be for us to separate finally. I can't go on like this."

"No," she answered in a toneless voice. "That will be best."

"You see," he went on, "there lies this absolute blank of nearly a year and a half between us. Who knows what ghosts may rise out of it to separate us again? I thought we might have bridged it over, but it seems we cannot."

"Oh, Dodge!" the old familiar name slipped out unconsciously. "You don't mean that—that—?"

"That there are any ghosts on my side you need be afraid of meeting? No, there are not. Though by Heaven! I don't know what right you have to demand it."

"I haven't, I haven't. And yet—but oh, Roger, you don't suspect me?"

"How should I know what to think? When I find you already hankering to go back, one must surely wonder why."

She wrung her hands. "Oh, how shall I convince you? Let me tell you everything." She came and knelt down beside him, hiding her eyes against the arm of his chair. "You remember you warned me about Valentine Garcia. Well, he was very kind about getting me work and so on, and there never was anything till just the very end; when I was ill and down on my luck, he came in one evening and coolly asked me if I would go and stay with him on

his house-boat as 'housekeeper.' At the first minute I did not understand, and then he laughed; and I was nearly ready to murder him."

Roger drew a sharp breath. "Shall I go up and horsewhip him?" he said.

She looked up at him. "I believe you would. But no; it was too much my own fault. I saw then what I had done in putting myself in such a position. He said—of course he supposed I had cast off all the trammels of conventionality. But I was straight always. Oh, indeed I was. If you don't believe me, you can ask Mrs. Temple-Smith or the people where I lodged."

"If I had to ask them, it would be all up. I would sooner put away my wife than ask other people about her. No, Em, I believe you: for whatever you did, you never lied to me."

"No, I never lied to you. I believe sometimes I used to treat you with a brutal frankness."

"I wish you would be entirely frank and open with me now. I cannot understand, and I will not let you go away again until I do. What makes it so impossible for you to stay with me? It cannot be your restless ambition: for at present your going on the stage is out of the question, whatever I might wish. Indeed, if your voice comes back, as I hope it may, it will never be strong enough for that sort of work."

"I know, I know. I have quite given all that up. But there are other things one might do, I suppose."

"But why? Still you don't explain why you cannot stay with me. Is it something in yourself, or something in me?"

"I wonder—don't you know how cruel you are, how changed?"

"Changed? I suppose I am. I don't think you at all realised what you did to me when you went away a year and a half ago. If you expected to find the same man you left, you must have looked on me as a kind of mechanical toy."

"And so you think to punish me by making me taste the same sort of pain. Oh, I know now I was a hateful brute to you; but I didn't know it then; I didn't understand."

"And what makes you understand now?" His voice shook a little as he put the question.

"It is no matter now. It is too late: I see that plainly enough. Some one said to me once—'Pray God to give you another chance.' I thought I had it; but it is a mockery. I will not have the husk when once I had the kernel."

"Em, Em! What do you mean?"

"People always say that a man's love soon burns out. The more he has cared for you, the sooner he tires. I don't suppose you even remember what I once made you suffer. If you did, you would be a little more pitiful I think."

He stooped forward close to her.

"Does this mean that you love me? If it does, put your arms round my neck and kiss me as you have never kissed me yet."

XXXII.

"THERE sometimes occurs in a strong soul, a love firm enough to transform itself into impassioned friendship, so as to become a duty, and appropriate the quality of virtue."

Judith let the volume of Chateaubriand in which she was reading, sink on her knee, while her eyes wandered away, as the eyes of those who muse are apt to do, beyond the vivid blossoming gardens, beyond the fringe of dark pines, to where the shining river broadened, seeking the infinite blue sea. Yes, it was possible, though the way was narrow; this was what had come to pass in her own life. The friendship which she once thought lost, had come by perilous ways, but it had reached a place of safety. It had been as "A passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky." They had come in a moment of crisis as it were through the fire, unharmed, unsinged, neither had the smell of fire passed upon them.

She took up the book again and turned a leaf or two, but her thoughts were no longer on the printed page; they had travelled away to that page of her life on which the passage had flashed a sudden light, and looking back on the way by which she had come, she felt like one who, refusing to look down, has traversed

a narrow path where one false step would have been fatal, and has gained a serene height.

Presently she raised her eyes to see the man who was in her thoughts, coming towards her, and laying down her book she held out her hand.

. . . . . .

Later they were standing together by the gate into the wood. After an hour's music she had walked down through the garden with him.

"And it is well with you now?" she asked, as he lingered a minute with his hand upon the gate.

He smiled and answered: "It is well."

Yet the smile was hardly one of contented prosperity or of self-satisfaction. If wishes attained give content, he had reason to be satisfied. The position he used to covet was his, and the love of the woman he had chosen. Yet it was less what had been granted, than what had been withheld, that had given meaning and colour to his life. These thoughts passed through his mind unspoken, but Judith read them.

"After all," she said musingly, "our most precious things are those we bring out of dark places. Earth hides her jewels in a mine."

"Aye; or in the depths of the sea."

"And it behoves us when we have to go down into deep waters, to bring up something better than salt drops. If music tells anything, you have brought up pearls out of your sorrow."

"Must those who love music, always learn first what sorrow means, I wonder?"

"I don't know; but sorrow's gate opens to us many meanings beyond itself—joyous ones as well as sad, and mystical ones beyond either."

"I hope, then, prosperity may not hide them."

"Ah, no; once learnt. For those who have gone through the ivory gates always keep the key."

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